the PARIS REVIEW

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an interview

Henry
de Montherlant

eight drawings
by
Tom Keogh

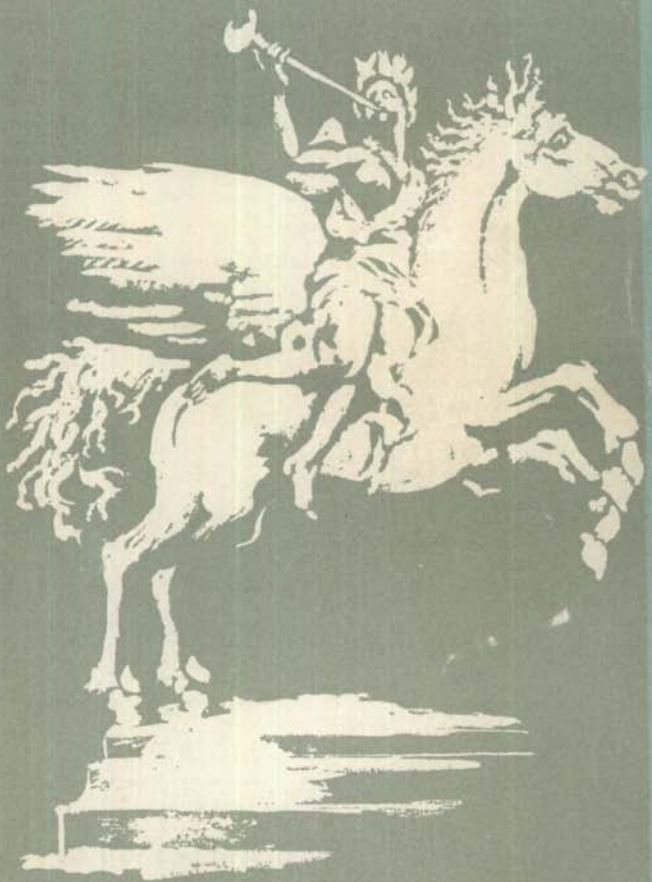
Short Stories

Poetry

Commentaries

Donald Hall
the Newdigate
prize poem

SPRING
1953



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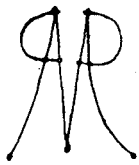

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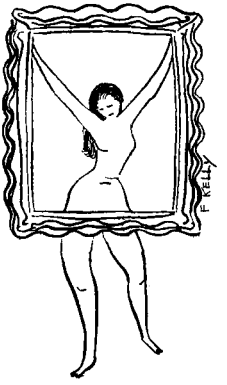

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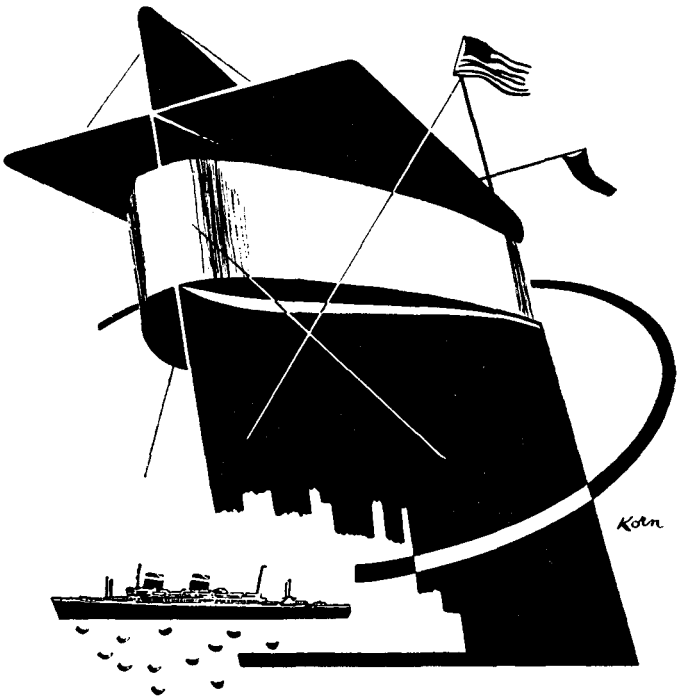

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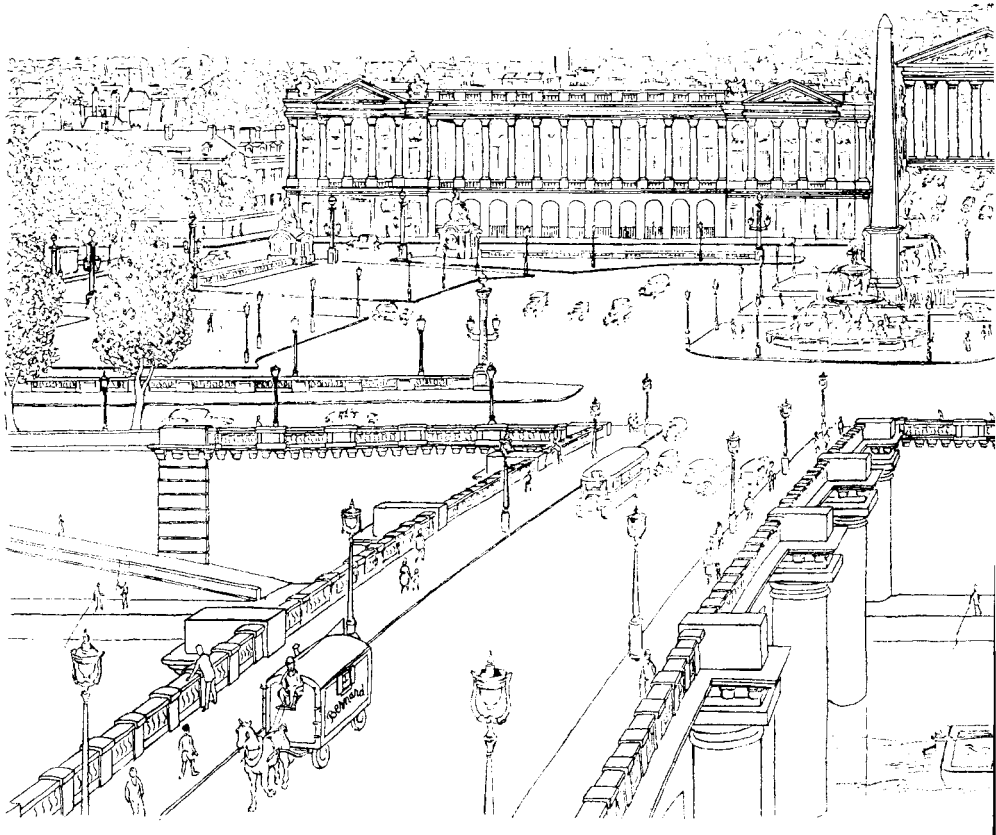

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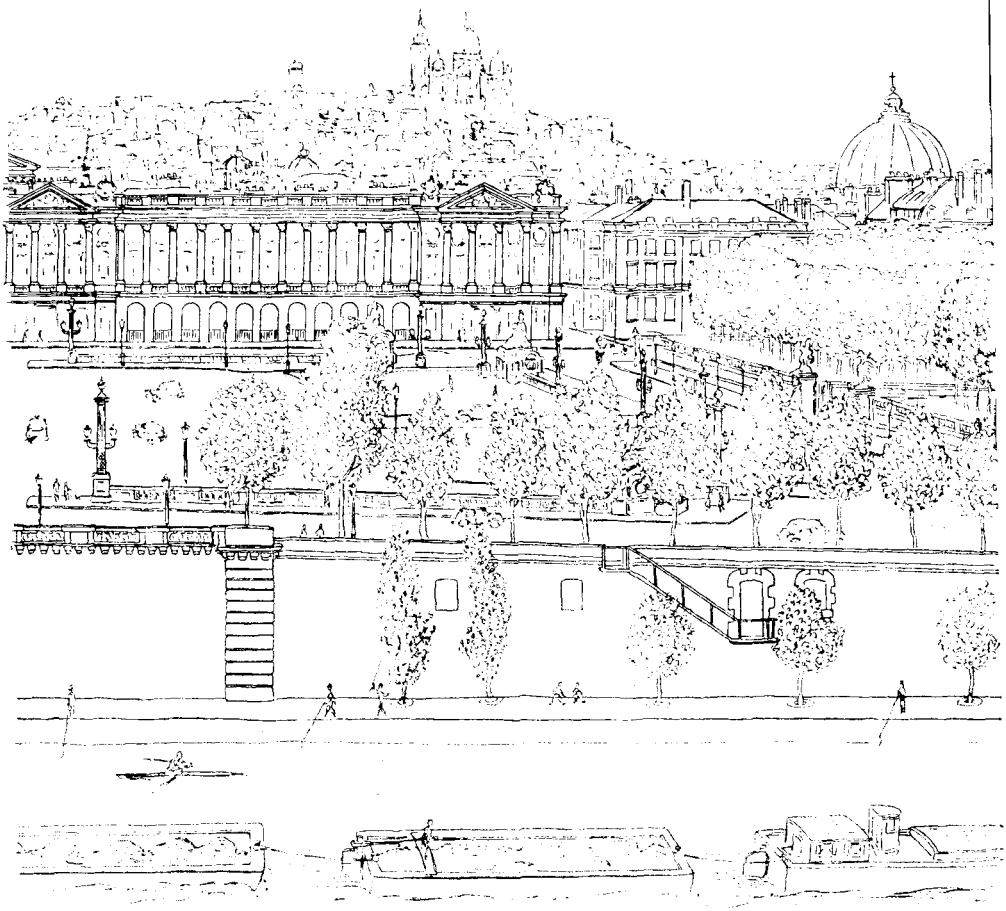

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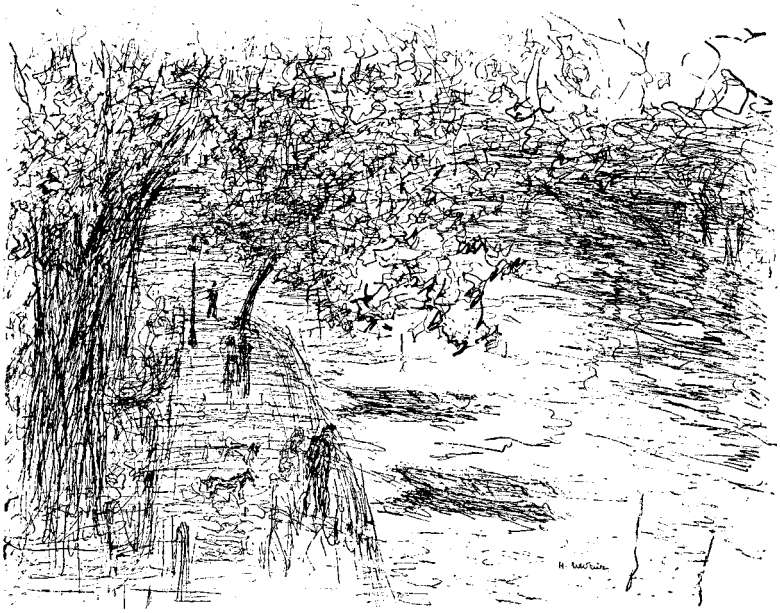

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LETTER TO AN EDITOR

Dear —:

THE preface which you all wanted me to write, and which I wanted to write, and finally wrote, came back to me from Paris today so marvelously changed and re-worded that it seemed hardly mine. Actually, you know, it shouldn't be mine. Prefaces are usually communal enterprises and they have a stern dull quality of group effort about them—of Manifesto, Proclamation of Aims, of "Where We Stand"—of editors huddled together in the smoke-laden, red-eyed hours of early morning, pruning and balancing syntax, juggling terms and, because each editor is an individual with different ideas, often compromising away all those careless personal words that make an individualistic statement exciting, or at least interesting. Prefaces, I'll admit, are a bore and consequently, more often than not, go unread. The one I sent you, so balanced and well-mannered and so dull—I could hardly read it myself when I finished it—when it came back to me with your emendations and corrections I couldn't read it at all. This, I realize, is the fault of neither or none of us; it's inevitable that what Truth I mumble to you at Lipp's over a beer, or that Ideal we are perfectly agreed upon at the casual hour of 2 A.M. becomes powerfully open to criticism

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as soon as it's cast in a printed form which, like a piece of sculpture, allows us to walk all around that Truth or Ideal and examine it front, side, and behind, and for minutes on end. Everyone starts hacking off an arm, a leg, an ear—and you end up with a lump. At any rate, I'd like to go over briefly a few of the things you questioned; we'll still no doubt disagree, but that's probably for the better. There are magazines, you know, where a questioning word amounts to dishonesty, and disagreement means defection.

First, I said, "Literarily speaking, we live in what has been described as the Age of Criticism. Full of articles on Kafka and James, on Melville, or whatever writer is in momentary ascendancy; laden with terms like "architectonic," "Zeitgeist," and "dichotomous," the literary magazines seem today on the verge of doing away with literature, not with any philistine bludgeon but by smothering it under the weight of learned chatter." (Perfect beginning for a preface, you may note; regard the arch rhythms, the way it fairly looks down the nose at the reader.)

All right, then I said, "There is little wonder" (always a nice oblique phrase to use in a preface) "that, faced with Œdipus and Myth in Charlotte Brontë, with meter in Pope and darkness in Dante, we put aside our current quarterly with its two short poems, its one intellectualized short story, in deference to *Life*, which brings us at least "The Old Man and the Sea." This, of course, as you remember, was only by way of getting to the first brave part of the Manifesto : that THE PARIS REVIEW would strive to give predominant space to the

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fiction and poetry of both established and new writers, rather than to people who use words like *Zeitgeist*. Now in rebuttal, one of you has written that it is not always editorial policy that brings such a disproportion of critical manuscripts across the editors' desks, pointing out that "in our schools and colleges all the emphasis is on analysis and organization of ideas, not creation." The result is that we have critics, not creators, and you go on to suggest that, since this is the natural state of things, we should not be too haughty in stating our intention of having more fiction and poetry in THE PARIS REVIEW.

To this I can only say : *d'accord*. Let's by all means leave out the lordly tone and merely say : dear reader, THE PARIS REVIEW *hopes* to emphasize creative work—fiction and poetry—not to the exclusion of criticism, but with the aim in mind of merely removing criticism from the dominating place it holds in most literary magazines and putting it pretty much where it belongs, i. e., somewhere near the back of the book. O.K? But as for *Zeitgeist*, which you accuse me of denouncing unnecessarily, I still don't like it, perhaps because, complying with the traditional explanation of intolerance, I am ignorant of what it means. I hope one of you will help me out.

Among the other points I tried to make was one which involved THE PARIS REVIEW having no axe to grind. In this we're pretty much in agreement, I believe, although one of you mentioned the fact that in the first number of *The Exile* there were "powerful blasts" by Pound, among others, which added considerably to the interest of the magazine. True, perhaps. But is it because we're sissies that we plan to beat no drum for anything; is it

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only because we're wan imitations of our predecessors —those who came out bravely for anything they felt deeply enough was worth coming out bravely for? I don't think so. I think that if we have no axes to grind, no drums to beat, it's because it seems to us—for the moment, at least—that the axes have all been ground, the drumheads burst with beating. This attitude does not necessarily make us—as some of the Older Boys have called us—the Silent Generation (the fact of THE PARIS REVIEW belies that), or the Scared Generation, either, content to lie around in one palsied, unprotesting mass. It's not so much a matter of protest now, but of waiting; perhaps, if we have to be categorized at all, we might be called the Waiting Generation—people who feel and write and observe, and wait and wait and wait. And go on writing. I think THE PARIS REVIEW should welcome these people into its pages—the good writers and good poets, the non-drumbeaters and non-axe-grinders. So long as they're good.

Finally, and along these lines, I was taken pretty much to task by one of you for making the perhaps too general statement that there are signs in the air that this generation can and will produce literature equal to that of any in the past. Well, I suppose that is another Ringing Assertion, but it's a writer's statement, almost necessarily, and not a critic's. A critic nowadays will set up straw-men, saying that Mailer had Ahab in mind when he created Sergeant Croft, that Jim Jones thought of Hamlet when he came up with his bedevilled Private Prewitt, stating further, however, that neither of these young men have created figures worthy of Melville or Shakespeare; they do this, or they leap to the opposite

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pole and cry out that no one writing today even *tries* to create figures of the tragic stature of Lear. For a writer, God forbid either course. I still maintain that the times get precisely the literature that they deserve, and that if the writing of this period is gloomy the gloom is not so much inherent in the literature as in the times. The writer's duty is to keep on writing, creating memorable Pvt. Prewitts and Sgt. Crofts, and to hell with Ahab. Perhaps the critics are right : this generation may not produce literature equal to that of any past generation—who cares? The writer will be dead before anyone can judge him—but he *must* go on writing, reflecting disorder, defeat, despair, should that be all he sees at the moment, but ever searching for the elusive love, joy, and hope—qualities which, as in the act of life itself, are best when they have to be struggled for, and are not commonly come by with much ease, either by a critic's formula or by a critic's yearning. If he does not think one way or another, that he can create literature worthy of himself and of his place, at this particular moment in history, in his society, then he'd better pawn his Underwood, or become a critic.

Ever faithfully yours,

Bill Styron

William Styron, *an Advisory Editor of* The Paris Review, *was awarded the Prix de Rome last year for his outstanding novel* Lie Down in Darkness. *His story* The Long March *is appearing presently in the first issue of* Discovery.

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ANTOINE BLONDIN
Translated by PATRICIA SOUTHGATE

DEATH ON THE AVENUE DE SÉGUR

HERE where we live, the avenues are deep and calm as alleys of a cemetery. The streets which run from the École Militaire to the Invalides seem somehow reserved for state funeral processions : one sidewalk in sun and one in shade, they stretch away between their frozen plane-trees, between their rows of withdrawn facades, empty of shops, empty of sound. There is, nevertheless, a sort of shivering suspense in the air, a sense of general misgiving in the face of the periodic bells, and the sky leans low on this quarter of mine, so very old before its time.

My house stands at the crossing of two silences. The absence of a policeman, which permits the elderly edifice to finish out its days in dignity, adds to the distinction of the place. Some mouldings in cornucopia form and a species of turret are the sole adornments it was given ; as for the rest of it, one might liken it to a thermometer—tall and narrow and constructed of windows to absorb the daylight. The daylight is never given back, and I wonder what becomes of it. (Here, by the way, is one of the principles which dominate the life of the house—that part of its life, at least, which is known to me—that it never sends back for the use of the world a single thing, neither the daylight, nor the elevator, nor its servants.)

Today I regarded it from a little distance, with the eyes of a stranger. Not everyone can do this with his own house, and it seems rather sad that it is possible at all. At any rate, the house made not the slightest effort to recognize me, pretended, even worse, that I wasn't there.

A priest, armed with the Last Sacraments, was hesitating

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before the door. In this neighborhood, where God delivers to your doorstep, this sight is as common—and far more discreet—than that of fire engines in the quarters where they have fires. Here there is never a fire, never a suicide, never an asphyxiation. But people die here nevertheless, every day, with engraved announcements and by appointment only. They lead a beautiful death.

The priest elected to push the heavy metal door, wrought of forged iron and backed with panes of glass. I think he savored the weight of good quality before he let it go. It swung to softly on my heels, and the priest said, "Excuse me." I offered him my left cheek to show him that I was his accomplice, but he ignored this gesture, bounding across the bright little entry which, paved in mosaics, is pagan, to say the least. I rejoined him at the foot of the stairway.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"Yes, Father," I answered, with such delightful reverence that he must have thought I'd been raised in "one of our institutions."

"In that case, would you be so good as to tell me what floor the Morderets live on?"

"I'm sorry, Father, I haven't the least idea."

He seemed astonished that I shouldn't know who was dying right under my own roof.

"We inhabitants," I went on, "when we want to know what we are like, contemplate the house across the street. I think it reflects our image faithfully. What other means have we? There's a blind woman on the first floor, a retired general on the second, on the third a viscount in the insurance business, on the fourth a widow, on the fifth a hunchback,

---

ANTOINE BLONDIN'S *first novel,* l'Europe buissonnière, *received the Prix des Deux Magots in 1948. The success of his recent novel,* Les Enfants du bon Dieu *reaffirms the opinion of Marcel Aymé, Jean Anouilh, and others, that he is one of the finest young writers in France.* Death on the Avenue de Ségur *is Mr. Blondin's first appearance in English.*

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on the sixth a perfect little girl, and so forth. As for the Morderets, I can't imagine who they could be."

"What do you mean, and so forth?" said he. "I'm not here to amuse myself."

"That's just the point: nobody amuses himself in this quarter. How can one, with generals and widows and viscounts? I know very well, though, that somebody must have..."

At this point, a crazy sort of music came careening down the stairwell, crashing about our heads, and a distant stamping deafened even the most secluded parts of the house.

"Well," said the priest, "and what do you do about those negroes?"

"It's not negroes," I said. "It's the hunchback. *Our* hunchback."

We returned to the entry and knocked at the concierge's door. Her alarm clock ticked industriously on her bureau. Always vigilant, the concierge is the conscience of her house. But nothing moved behind the curtains. A card stuck under the curtain-rod read : *the conscience will be right back.*

I realize now that a second principle governs the life of all these apartment houses, the principle of communicating concierges. Year in, year out, we never say two words to our neighbors, nor they to us, and all the while, up and down the avenue, our concierges visit with one another, assiduously. By means of this fragile network woven along the ground, these houses cast out a few sturdy little roots, to which they unquestionably owe the fact that they haven't toppled long ago.

The service stairs facilitate exchanges between the concierge and the personnel who navigate about beneath the rafters, but there is nothing to report from our odorless, songless, silent kitchens. These households scarcely move at all. Our ancient maids throw up a barrier of mournful fidelity against the frantic questions of the concierge. On the other hand, the concierge is married to the concierge's husband, and he has been hidden from us. At the crack of dawn he is off to the grammar school, to carry from class

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to class the list of absences, to carry absence, that is to say, to carry nothing at all. It is rumored in the playground that, for a certain consideration, he will erase an absence. This absence of absence is rather terrifying. Then he hurries home, where his wife, in turn, blots *him* out. And at night he sleeps the sleep of a prince-consort in the vast bed, mounted like a captain's bridge, with the rope which releases the lock on the front door trailing into it.

From sleeping in this fashion, the man, the woman, and the rope between them like a snake, there has come a child, a little girl. Children *have* come before, I am aware, but never in our house. So we immediately thought of her as the child of the building, as the child that all of us, hunchbacks, widows, orphans, generals and viscounts had brought into the world, a small wan mouse delivered by this six-story mountain which suffocates her, hollows out her cheeks, just to show her the dim view it takes of the entire business.

She has just been given, for her fifth birthday, a cross to hang around her neck. The blind woman hasn't seen her, the general hasn't decorated her, the viscount scoffs at such distinctions, the widow, shut in her room, knew nothing of it, the hunchback did not straighten up, and the perfect little girl dreams only of another little girl just like herself. This is how we pass up humble pleasures.

"We celebrated it at the pastryman's shop before coming home, indeed we did, Lily."

"That reminds me, I saw a priest going into your place just now. You'd better go and see."

"A priest, oh my God! Do you think he's taking a census? And my poor little angel not yet baptized!"

"Well, you just stay right here, dearie, he'll be coming out again before you know it."

★

"Let us proceed," said the priest with simplicity as he mounted the first steps.

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He wasn't wearing the usual boots, I noticed, but rather elegant low shoes. It seemed to me, further, from what I could see of his delicate stooped silhouette in the light through the dark panes of glass, that his cassock hung very well. I trailed him like a shadow...

The blind woman has never seen the light of day, but a charitable friend comes from time to time to tell her she's not missing a thing. This friend is very ugly, whereas the blind woman could be beautiful. She hears every sound, and carries the weight of the world in the hollow of her hand as she longs for the moment when her eyes will close forever, eyes which are open all night long. An institution sends a series of companions to her side, in rotation, and so she is walked about a little. But on the whole, the world lets her slip through its fingers.

"I must detain you a moment," she said, stretching her arms toward us as we stood on the threshold. She pushed us toward a living-room, a sort of dancefloor, rather, where all the furniture had been lined against the wall to keep her from bruising herself. The priest sat down like a wall-flower, with infinite courtesy.

"What do you think of me, frankly?" demanded the blind woman, planting herself in the middle of the room.

"My child, my dear child," said the priest, "I will speak to you of another Light..." As for myself, I couldn't take my eyes off the young woman's stockings, which were floating giddily about her knees.

"Well now, about this *Morderet*," I called out. "Does that name mean anything to you?" I almost shouted, as though I were speaking to a deaf person, a remote spirit, a sleeping person whom I must arouse.

Elated, she turned to me.

"Yes, it does. It means: what a flood of sunshine! It's like a fruit that one eats off the tree, the flesh of... of... the human flesh"

"My poor child," murmured the priest. "We must not linger over all these questions."

After a moment, the blind woman asked us, "Am I beau-

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tiful?" Slowly she caressed her face as she accompanied us to the door.

In the hall again, the priest gripped the banister. I admired his delicate white hand, the index finger imperious like a scepter. "Let us go higher," he said, his head thrown back, his eyes half-closed.

With the coming of every dawn, the general dies. A long-drawn bugle note pierces the tumult of his memories, and he charges out of bed to consult the barometer. The general loves precision, and all instruments which pretend to it. He has even set up at the back of his apartment a small workshop where he can putter. He is a born putterer.

Between the two wars, during his wasted years, so to speak, he invented a gun which could be shot with one's back turned. Or something like that. The Chiefs of Staff viewed the invention with a jaundiced eye.

One does not turn one's back on danger. One doesn't know the meaning of the word.

Having watched in vain for a new star under Vichy, the general became Distributor of Milk. He dispensed the white drops of nourishment in the Western Sector. After the liberation, the hunchback had him arrested for a few hours as a collaborator. But now the general himself has a milk ration. He drinks a little cup in the morning and a little cup at four, between his walks. For the general walks interminably, pacing out in pantomime that brilliant career which leads from the École Militaire to the Invalides; from the trumpets of dawn to the trumpets of dusk he marshals his memories of battle, his shadow, as he passes along the barracks, growing taller on the wall.

His majestic wife knits him regulation ear-muffs.

The door opened a crack:

"You're mistaken, no Morderets here."

"Just the same," I say to the maid, "perhaps you could direct us."

"In the twenty-five years I have been in the service of the General and Madame, at Tafilalet, Constantine, Auch, Vincennes, et cetera, I have never heard that name."

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"And the general?"

"The general is taking his exercise," said the maid, and closed the door.

The priest leaned out into the stair-well, where the sun-splotched lavender-and-rose reflections caressed his soft silver curls.

"Four more flights," he said.

The viscount has no family history, so his wife has invented one for him. Looking down our avenue, which runs into the overhead metro, she is afraid that people might think she lives in an unfashionable area, which indeed she almost does. She would die of mortification. So, to avoid any errors, she gives large receptions which frighten her husband, and in the evening, washing up the dishes, they insult each other.

Our ring on the doorbell occasioned a tremendous flutter, we'd shattered a circle of elegant women! Their husbands, more solidly constructed, were lined up broadside against the windows. The lamps had already been lighted.

The priest arranged his slender presence before the fireplace, turned his collar up slightly, and commenced his account with relish :

"The Morderets? I was utterly unaware of them until one of the ladies in our chapter advised me that there was a danger of death in the family. But it seems hardly possible, in this house. Have I come too soon? Or too late? There are *so* many thresholds to cross, you know."

With an agile tweak, he flicked a speck of dust from his sleeve, and smiled.

"Who knows, Father," the viscountess interposed. "But since you have come, you must do the honors."

The priest did her bidding graciously, pouring a little champagne into the glasses of the guests.

"Morderet? No, really, I can't say that I know them," said another lady, thoughtfully pursing her lips. "Of course, I must admit that we go out very seldom these days."

"At any rate, it *is* so fascinating," breathed another. "They are the unknowns of the house, I suppose."

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As we left, they thanked us for the excitement we had caused quite in spite of ourselves. They mistook me for a young deacon, and treated me accordingly.

"The next time," the viscountess whispered in the doorway, "it will be much more esoteric."

"Charming people, absolutely charming," said the priest. "We'll have to come again some day." His ivory face colored imperceptibly, his nostrils palpitating ever so slightly on either side of the precise bridge of his nose.

"We must be getting closer," he murmured.

A rustling of taffeta ten steps above us, a hasty withdrawal: the widow was watching us.

For years the widow has lived in shadow, closing forever her shutters and drawing her curtains against the misfortunes of the era. (At night in our building, by the way, the only light shines forth from the window of the blind woman. This has long since ceased to astonish us.)

The widow has permanently installed herself on the landing, lurking in wait for heaven knows what homecoming or leave-taking. She paces about, three steps to the left, three steps to the right, pausing to yawn before the immense mirror where she breaks in her new hats: the birds of paradise, the tulles, the taffeta, the pink organdy... sufficient unto each day are her pains. The widow will die with a bonnet on.

Her hats change colors with the seasons. We are only allowed to admire them furtively, for she crouches back at our passing, obscuring herself in the doorway, her head to one side, one leg invisible, in the heron-like posture of prostitutes. Her stare seems to pierce one's back.

We startled her a bit, and I feared the worst.

"Don't touch me," she screamed, locking herself in with a great clanging of bolts.

"She must think we're taking up a collection," muttered the priest. "Really, do we give that appearance?"

"We won't find what we're looking for here," I said.

The door half-opened for a second:

"I can't receive you, I don't have my hat on!" the widow screeched.

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"No harm done, my daughter," answered the priest, his nose pressed to the door. Then, leaning towards me, "She's a little deranged," he confided.

She is also said to be very rich, but what *isn't* said these days? The hunchback believes she lives off white slavery, but he keeps that to himself. To whom could he reveal it? We would not understand him, although he is the most emancipated of us all. That hump of his has really been around.

He comes in after midnight, hiccuping his name to the concierge. We have heard the motor of his car, and can sleep in peace at last.

The hunchback has women at his table in velvety night-clubs, but he always comes home alone. Still alone, he dances in the afternoon as he has seen others do, with a chair held in his arms. Later, perhaps, he will have a try with the real thing.

He doesn't hear us ring the doorbell, not being used to having it rung. Besides, the latest tunes make too much noise. We listen to him pounding up and down the floor between his four walls.

"It's a samba," I said.

"I do not object to the dance when it is well executed," declared the priest, "but here we are wasting our time."

He sat down suddenly on a step and made a face.

"I think we've knocked everywhere," he sighed. "One of our ladies must have made a mistake. They write everything helter-skelter on the agenda, and they overwork themselves so, poor things!"

"One never knows," I said. "There is one more flight, and the perfect little girl reveals strange things from time to time. She is in the house more often than I am."

The perfect little girl has a fly-by-night husband, and plenty of time on her hands. For her the apartment never seems to end. She would go down, if she dared, to dance a moment with the hunchback, who still calls her "Mademoiselle," as in the old days. She would be glad of the chance to touch his hump, it's supposed to bring good luck.

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The perfect little girl feels that life is neglecting her. Among the fragile porcelains, the somber paintings, the majestic tapestries, the faded gilt, the precious woods, stranded in this luxurious shipwreck by a stricter generation, she dreams of outlandish festivals and subtle intrigues, and cultivates a worry about money that she waters carefully every evening.

To keep the household on its feet, she paints menageries, giraffes and things. The toys pile up; neglected, in a sunny room that smells of varnish. Nothing is missing here but the baby. But does one *do* that sort of thing? People who have babies live beyond their incomes.

One fine day, some burglars broke into the apartment. "You scared me," she said, "I thought it was the gas collector." She owns nothing worldly, and was unable to guide them in their choice. She would so have liked to please them, but they just couldn't decide: the Fragonards were too much, and the music box not enough. All the same, they carried down the garbage when they left, it was right on their way, after all.

Our garbage does not do justice to the building. It is meager, and we disguise it as much as possible. The blind woman is on a diet, the general is a frugal man, the viscount parsimonious, the widow thrifty, the hunchback goes to restaurants, and we, we are poor, so what can you expect? The burglars must have had a sorry opinion of us. The perfect little girl hopes, however, that they will come back at Christmas time.

I took the key from under her doormat.

"Have you got something to eat?" she asked. "Oh wonderful! You've got someone with you."

I must admit that it's one of my habits, and she submits tenderly to these jovial gatherings.

"Do you think he's wearing pants under his skirt?" she whispered.

"Naturally," I answered, hurrying the priest toward the sofa with cushions.

"How about Scotchmen?" said my perfect little wife.

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I cut her short:

"Father, I hope you will do us the honor of sharing our dinner."

But we had not forgotten the object of our search, which lent a charm and mystery to the meal. The priest turned out to be a superb orator, he pleased my wife enormously. I was ecstatic.

Just as he was leaving, she had an idea:

"These Morderets," she suggested. "Why don't you try calling Information?" The telephone plays an important part in her life, and, miraculously, it hadn't been cut off. But there again we got no help at all.

"My conscience is cleared," the priest concluded. "The Lord will know his servants."

This, however pertinent, was his final word; it left us wondering how to make ourselves known.

The passageway where the chambermaids die smells of dusty petticoats, old trunks, and odds and ends. It is reached by an extension of stairs, past a dripping water meter.

Elina Morderet is alone in life, alone in death, alone on the top floor. During the Occupation, the servants had been brought down to live in the apartments, not only to give the feeling there was somebody nearby, but also in order that their rooms could be used for storing potatoes, coal, and paper securities. It was a great domestic migration. But the widow, fearful for the safety of her hat ingredients, would not permit this irregularity, and did not have Elina move down into her apartment.

Elina is suffocating. She can no longer reach the jug on the rickety table, and can scarcely make out the photograph of her little nephew at his first communion, the crucifix above her head, the faded palm frond. The garret window gives on a sky blotted out by a frieze of chimneys. Who will come to give her light?

We all know her well, though, old Elina, she is part of the house. The tenants used to ask her to move furniture.

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We thought she would die in the attempt, but here she is dying in her bed. Her bed? No, she is dying in someone else's bed, a narrow mattress on a folding spring.

She thinks we are long in coming ; she is afraid to go without her Last Rites. Time passes, and now the priest has given up his search for the mysterious Morderets. Tomorrow is another day, he will clear up the question then. He will check the records.

But tell me, in what records are inscribed the family names of old servants?

For Eternity, servants have only a first name, like saints.

Melanie, Ursula, Rosalie, Apolline, Clemence, Opportune, Gertrude, Victoire.

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TWO CHORAL STANZAS

I

The dove returns ; it found no resting place ;
It was in flight all night above the shaken seas ;
Beneath ark eaves
The dove shall magnify the tiger's bed ;
Give the dove peace ;
The split-tail swallows leave the sill at dawn,
At dusk blue swallows shall return.
On the third day the crow shall fly ;
The crow, the crow, the spider-coloured crow,
The crow shall find new mud to walk upon.

II

And as we spoke the Nicene Creed we were called out
To fight the barn afire
And here the summer's corn is born again
In reformation into air,
The children cry and call
And throw their snowballs in the fire ; the barleys burn ;
The walls are folding ; burning rust and gold
The loft hangs fire in air ; the straw and chaff
Burn black the timid dampness of the night
And churn the ancient wall-stones to a dust.

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'Gentlemen! Gentlemen!' Basle station echoed to the celebrated word. 'If only more people would behave like gentlemen.' It was early for an hour of morning, and the passengers from the Boulogne train, who were mostly English, were trying to decant themselves into the train for Lucerne and the south. Difficult, for the Lucerne train was smaller, and they were beginning to fight. They did not want to fight, but by hugs they could not avoid it; there was nothing else to do. Without losing their tempers, they screamed and wedged and hit one another behind the knees with suit cases, and snatched at the brass bars of the train as it backed itself to a standstill. Some had ladies with them, and claimed priority of treatment on that account. 'Steady on, sir, you might consider the ladies.' Others cried 'Both the ladies'. One tourist was pushed beneath the oncoming wheels, another rescued him, and still the appeal for gentlemanliness arose, that password into a city whose gates are barred for ever.

The station, immense and modern, paid no great heed. Not even the daily transit of the Island Race was an event to her. She, the changing house of Europe. Trains ran into her from four or five countries, was last and slaved themselves, ate in her refreshment rooms, and refreshed when necessary; she thought in terms of trains. Behind her lay the Rhine and a cathedral town and a swift green river, but she only served the town as an outlet to its needs. Its needs were little to her, its memories of a Mediaeval Council nothing; she was indifferent to Cardinals and Kings, and to all but ethnologists junctions.

Now Martin, relieving whilst [illegible] had managed to walk right down the train, He had spied the Lucerne train reposing at a distant platform, had measured it with his eye, and had calculated where the end of the carriage would be when it drew up. Telling Venetia (his wife) and Lady Borlase (his mother in law) to keep out of the crowd, he had slipped past the other tourists, and laid a gloved hand on the door. The rush followed. He was swept sideways by the train and off his legs by the crowd, and it was he who was nearly killed. The man who saved him had the look and gesture of a warrior. He impressed Martin very much, and with the train Lady Louise half an hour later he set out down the corridor to find him and to thank him.

The battle was over. Things had calmed down now. Everyone had found a seat, for there was plenty of room after all, and nearly everyone had forgotten. The right

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THE ART OF FICTION I

E. M. FORSTER

That is not all Arctic Summer—*there is almost half as much of it again—but that's all I want to read, because now it goes off, or at least I think so, and I do not want my voice to go out into the air while my heart is sinking. It will be more interesting to consider what the problems before me were, and why I was unlikely to solve them. I should like to do this, though it may involve us a little in fiction-technicalities...*

So said E. M. Forster, addressing an audience at the Aldeburgh Festival of 1951. He had been reading part of an unfinished novel called *Arctic Summer*. At the end of the reading, he went on to explain why he had not finished the novel, which led him to mention what he called "fiction-technicalities."

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The present article is the first of a series dealing with such technicalities. Following up on Mr. Forster's Aldeburgh remarks we have tried to record his views on such matters as he gave them in an interview at King's College, Cambridge, on the evening of June 20th, 1952.

SCENE

A spacious and high-ceilinged room, furnished in the Edwardian taste. One's attention is caught by a massive carved wooden mantelpiece of elaborate structure holding blue china in its niches. Large gilt-framed portrait-drawings on the walls (his Thornton ancestors and others), a "Turner" by his great-uncle, and some modern pictures. Books of all sorts, handsome and otherwise, in English and French; armchairs decked in little shawls; a piano, a solitaire-board, and the box of a Zoe-trope; profusion of opened letters; slippers neatly arranged in waste-paper basket.

In reading what follows the reader must imagine Mr. Forster's manner, which though of extreme amenity is a firm one: precise, yet none the less elusive, administering a series of tiny surprises. He makes a perpetual slight displacement of the expected emphasis. His habit was to answer our questions by brief statements, followed by decorative asides, often of great interest, but very difficult to reproduce.

INTERVIEWERS

To begin with, may we ask you again, why did you never finish *Arctic Summer?*

FORSTER

I have really answered this question in the foreword I wrote for the reading. The crucial passage was this:

"...whether these problems are solved or not, there remains a still graver one. What is going to happen? I had got my antithesis all right, the antithesis between the civilized man, who hopes for an Arctic Summer, in which there is time to get things done, and the heroic man. But I had not settled what is going to happen, and that is why the novel remains a fragment. The novelist should I think always settle when he starts what is going to happen, what his major event is to be. He may alter this event as he approaches it, indeed he probably will, indeed he probably had better, or the novel becomes tied up and tight. But the sense of a solid mass ahead, a mountain round or over or through which (*he*

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interposed, "in this case it would be *through*") the story must somehow go is most valuable and for the novels I've tried to write essential."

INTERVIEWERS

How much is involved in this "solid mass?" Does it mean that all the important steps in the plot must also be present in the original conception?

FORSTER

Certainly not all the steps. But there must be something, some major object towards which one is to approach. When I began *A Passage to India* I knew that something important happened in the Malabar Caves, and that it would have a central place in the novel—but I didn't know what it would be.

INTERVIEWERS

But if you didn't know what was going to happen to the characters in either instance, why was the case of *A Passage to India* so different from that of *Arctic Summer?*... In both cases you had your antithesis.

FORSTER

The atmosphere of *Arctic Summer* did not approach the density of what I had in *A Passage to India.* Let me see how to explain. The Malabar Caves represented an area in which concentration can take place. A cavity. *(We noticed that he always spoke of the caves quite literally—as for instance when he interrupted himself earlier to say that the characters had to pass* "through" *them.)* They were something to focus everything up: they were to engender an event like an egg. What I had in *Arctic Summer* was thinner, a background and color only.

INTERVIEWERS

You spoke of antitheses in your novels. Do you regard these as essential to any novel you might write?

FORSTER

Let me think... There was one in *Howards End.* Perhaps a rather subtler one in *The Longest Journey*...

INTERVIEWERS

Would you agree that all your novels not only deal with some dilemma but are intended to be both true and useful in regard to it... so that if you felt a certain dilemma was

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too extreme, its incompatibles too impossible to reconcile, you wouldn't write about it?

FORSTER

True and lovable would be my antithesis. I don't think useful comes into it. I'm not sure that I would be put off simply because a dilemma that I wanted to treat was insoluble; at least, I don't think I should be.

INTERVIEWERS

While we are on the subject of the planning of novels, has a novel ever taken an unexpected direction?

FORSTER

Of course, that wonderful thing, a character running away with you—which happens to everyone—that's happened to me, I'm afraid.

INTERVIEWERS

Can you describe any technical problem that especially bothered you in one of the published novels?

FORSTER

I had trouble with the junction of Rickie and Stephen. *(The hero of* The Longest Journey *and his half-brother.)* How to make them intimate, I mean. I fumbled about a good deal. It is all right once they are together... I didn't know how to get Helen to *Howards End.* That part is all contrived. There are too many letters. And again, it is all right once she is there. But ends always give me trouble.

INTERVIEWERS

Why is that?

FORSTER

It is partly what I was talking about a moment ago. Characters run away with you, and so won't fit on to what is coming.

INTERVIEWERS

Another question of detail. What was the exact function of the long description of the Hindu Festival in *A Passage to India?*

FORSTER

It was architecturally necessary. I needed a lump, or a Hindu temple if you like—a mountain standing up. It is

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well placed ; and it gathers up some strings. But there ought to be more after it. The lump sticks out a little too much.

INTERVIEWERS

To leave technical questions for a moment, have you ever described any type of situation of which you have had no personal knowledge?

FORSTER

The home-life of Leonard and Jacky in *Howards End* is one case. I knew nothing about that. I believe I brought it off.

INTERVIEWERS

How far removed in time do you have to be from an experience in order to describe it?

FORSTER

Place is more important than time in this matter. Let me tell you a little more about *A Passage to India*. I had a great deal of difficulty with the novel, and thought I would never finish it. I began it in 1912, and then came the war. I took it with me when I returned to India in 1921, but found what I had written wasn't India at all. It was like sticking a photograph on a picture. However, I couldn't *write* it when I was in India. When I got away, I could get on with it.

INTERVIEWERS

Some critics have objected to your way of handling incidents of violence. Do you agree with their objections?

FORSTER

I think I solved the problem satisfactorily in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. In other cases, I don't know. The scene in the Malabar Caves is a good substitute for violence. —Which were the incidents you didn't like?

INTERVIEWERS

I have always been worried by the suddenness of Gerald's death in *The Longest Journey* (1). Why did you treat it in that way?

(1) The famous fifth chapter of *The Longest Journey* begins "Gerald died that afternoon."

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FORSTER

It had to be passed by. But perhaps it was passed by in the wrong way.

INTERVIEWERS

I have also never felt comfortable about Leonard Bast's seduction of Helen in *Howards End.* It is such a sudden affair. It seems as though we are not told enough about it for it to be convincing. One might say that it came off allegorically but not realistically.

FORSTER

I think you may be right. I did it like that out of a wish to have surprises. It has to be a surprise for Margaret, and this was best done by making it a surprise for the reader too. Too much may have been sacrificed to this.

INTERVIEWERS

A more general question. Would you admit to there being any symbolism in your novels? Lionel Trilling rather seems to imply that there is, in his book on you—symbolism, that is, as distinct from allegory or parable. "Mrs. Moore," he says, "will act with a bad temper to Adela, but her actions will somehow have a good echo; and her children will be her further echo..."

FORSTER

No, I didn't think of that. But mightn't there be some of it elsewhere? Can you try me with some more examples?

INTERVIEWERS

The tree at Howards End? *(A Wych-elm, frequently referred to in the novel.)*

FORSTER

Yes, that was symbolical; it was the genius of the house.

INTERVIEWERS

What was the significance of Mrs. Wilcox's influence on the other characters after her death?

FORSTER

I was interested in the imaginative effect of someone alive, but in a different way from other characters—living in other lives.

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INTERVIEWERS

Were you influenced by Samuel Butler in this? I mean, by his theories of vicarious immortality?

FORSTER

No. *(Pause.)* I think I have a more poetical mind than Butler's.

INTERVIEWERS

Now can we ask you a few questions about the immediate business of writing?— Do you keep a notebook?

FORSTER

No, I should feel it improper.

INTERVIEWERS

But you would refer to diaries and letters?

FORSTER

Yes, that's different.

INTERVIEWERS

When you go, say, to the circus, would you ever feel, "how nice it would be to put that in a novel?"

FORSTER

No, I should feel it improper. I never say "that might be useful." I don't think it is right for an author to do so. *(He spoke firmly.)* However I have been inspired on the spot. *The Story of a Panic* is the simplest example; *The Road from Colonus* is another. Sense of a place also inspired me to write a short story called *The Rock*, but the inspiration was poor in quality, and the editors wouldn't take the story. But I have talked about this in the introduction to my short stories.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you pre-figure a shape to your novels?

FORSTER

No, I am too unvisual to do so. *(We found this surprising in view of his explanation of the Hindu Festival scene, above.)*

INTERVIEWERS

Does this come out in any other way?

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FORSTER

I find it difficult to recognize people when I meet them; though I remember about them. I remember their voices.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you have any Wagnerian leit-motif system to help you keep so many themes going at the same time?

FORSTER

Yes, in a way, and I'm certainly interested in music and musical methods. Though I shouldn't call it a system.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you write every day, or only under inspiration?

FORSTER

The latter. But the act of writing inspires me. It is a nice feeling... *(indulgently)*. Of course, I had a very literary childhood. I was the author of a number of works between the ages of six and ten. There was *Ear-rings through the Keyhole* and *Scuffles in a Wardrobe*.

INTERVIEWERS

Which of your novels came first to your mind?

FORSTER

Half of *A Room with a View*. I got that far, and then there must have been a hitch.

INTERVIEWERS

Did you ever attempt a novel of an entirely different sort from the ones you have published?

FORSTER

For some time I had the idea of an historical novel. The setting was to have been a Renaissance one. Reading *Thaïs* (by Anatole France) finally decided me to try it. But nothing came of it in the end.

INTERVIEWERS

How do you name your characters?

FORSTER

I usually find the name at the start, but not always. Rickie's brother had several names. *(He showed us some*

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early manuscript portions of The Longest Journey *in which* Stephen Wonham *appeared as* Siegfried; *also an omitted chapter, which he described as "extremely romantic".) Wonham* is a country name and so is *Quested. (We looked at an early draft of* A Passage to India *in which to his surprise the heroine was found going under the name of Edith. This was later changed to Janet, before becoming Adela.) Herriton* I made up. *Munt* was the name of my first governess in the house in Hertfordshire. There really was a family called Howard who once owned the real *Howard's End. Where Angels Fear to Tread* should have been called *Monteriano,* but the publisher thought this wouldn't sell. It was Dent (Professor E. J. Dent) who gave me the present title.

INTERVIEWERS

How much do you admit to modelling your characters on real people?

FORSTER

We all like to pretend we don't use real people, but one does actually. I used some of my family. Miss Bartlett was my Aunt Emily—they all read the book but they none of them saw it. Uncle Willie turned into Mrs. Failing. He was a bluff and simple character *(correcting himself)*... bluff without being simple. Miss Lavish was actually a Miss Spender. Mrs. Honeychurch was my grandmother. The three Miss Dickinsons condensed into two Miss Schlegels. Philip Herriton I modelled on Professor Dent. He knew this, and took an interest in his own progress. I have used several tourists.

INTERVIEWERS

Do all your characters have real life models?

FORSTER

In no book have I got down more than the people I like, the person whom I think I am, and the people who irritate me. This puts me among the large body of authors who are not really novelists, and have to get on as best they can with these three categories. We have not the power of observing the variety of life and describing it dispassionately. There are a few who have done this. Tolstoy was one, wasn't he?

INTERVIEWERS

Can you say anything about the process of turning a real person into a fictional one?

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FORSTER

A useful trick is to look back upon such a person with half-closed eyes, fully describing certain characteristics. I am left with about two-thirds of a human being and can get to work. A likeness isn't aimed at and couldn't be obtained, because a man's only himself amidst the particular circumstances of his life and not amid other circumstances. So that to refer back to Dent when Philip was in difficulties with Gino, or to ask one and one-half Miss Dickinsons how Helen should comport herself with an illegitimate baby would have ruined the atmosphere and the book. When all goes well, the original material soon disappears, and a character who belongs to the book and nowhere else emerges.

INTERVIEWERS

Do any of your characters represent yourself at all?

FORSTER

Rickie more than any. Also Philip. And Cecil (in *A Room with a View*) has got something of Philip in him.

INTERVIEWERS

What degree of reality do your characters have for you after you have finished writing about them?

FORSTER

Very variable. There are some I like thinking about. Rickie and Stephen, and Margaret Schlegel—they are characters whose fortunes I have been interested to follow. It doesn't matter if they died in the novel or not.

INTERVIEWERS

We have got a few more questions about your work as a whole. First, to what degree is each novel an entirely fresh experiment?

FORSTER

To quite a large extent. But I wonder if experiment is the word?

INTERVIEWERS

Is there what Henry James called "a figure in the carpet?"
(A hidden pattern behind the whole of an author's work.)
(He looked dubious.)

Well, do you like having secrets from the reader?

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FORSTER

(Brightening) Ah now, that's a different question... I was pleased when Peter Burra (1) noticed that the wasp upon which Godbole meditates during the festival in *A Passage to India* had already appeared earlier in the novel.

INTERVIEWERS

Had the wasps any esoteric meaning?

FORSTER

Only in the sense that there is something esoteric in India about all animals—. I was just putting it in ; and afterwards I saw it was something that might return non-logically in in the story later.

INTERVIEWERS

How far aware are you of your own technical clevernesses in general?

FORSTER

We keep coming back to that. People will not realize how little conscious one is of these things ; how one flounders about. They want us to be so much better-informed than we are. If critics could only have a course on writers' *not* thinking things out... a course of lectures... *(he smiled)*.

INTERVIEWERS

You have said elsewhere that the authors you have learned most from were Jane Austen and Proust. What did you learn from Jane Austen technically?

FORSTER

I learned the possibilities of domestic humor. I was more ambitious than she was, of course ; I tried to hitch it on to other things.

INTERVIEWERS

And from Proust?

(1) Burra is a well-known critic, the author of the preface to the "Everyman" Edition of *A Passage to India*.

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FORSTER

I learned ways of looking at character from him. The modern sub-conscious way. He gave me as much of the modern way as I could take. I couldn't read Freud or Jung myself; it had to be filtered to me.

INTERVIEWERS

Did any other novelists influence you technically? What about Meredith?

FORSTER

I admired him—the *Egoist* and the better constructed bits of the other novels; but then that's not the same as his influencing me. I don't know if he did that. He did things I couldn't do. What I admired was the sense of one thing opening into another. You go into a room with him, and then that opens into another room, and that into a further one.

INTERVIEWERS

What led you to make the remark quoted by Lionel Trilling, that the older you get the less it seemed to you to matter that an artist should "develop."

FORSTER

I am more interested in achievement than in advance on it and decline from it. And I am more interested in works than in authors. The paternal wish of critics to show how a writer dropped off or picked up as he went along seems to me misplaced. I am only interested in myself as a producer. What was it Mahler said?... "anyone will sufficiently understand me who will trace my development through my nine symphonies." This seems odd to me; I couldn't imagine myself making such a remark; it seems too uncasual. Other authors find themselves much more an object of study. I am conceited, but not interested in myself in this particular way. Of course I like reading my own work, and often do it. I go gently over the bits that I think are bad.

INTERVIEWERS

But you think highly of your own work?

FORSTER

That was implicit, yes. My regret is that I haven't written a bit more—that the body, the corpus, isn't bigger.

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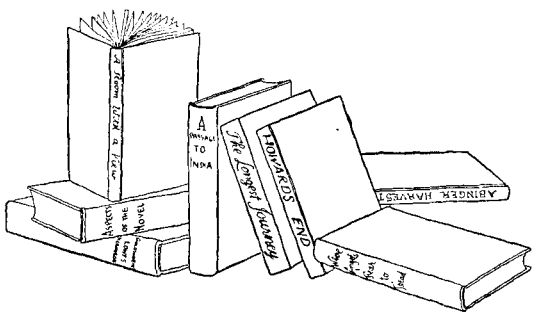
I think I am different from other writers; they profess much more worry (I don't know if it is genuine). I have always found writing pleasant, and don't understand what people mean by "throes of creation." I've enjoyed it, but believe that in some ways it is good. Whether it will last, I have no idea.

P. N. FURBANK
F. J. H. HASKELL

(In subsequent issues the Paris Review *will present François Mauriac, Graham Greene, William Styron, Irwin Shaw and others on the art of fiction.)*



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EXILE

EACH of us waking to the window's light
Has found the curtains changed, our pictures gone;
Our furniture has vanished in the night
And left us to an unfamiliar dawn,
Even the contours of our room are strange
And everything is change.
Waking, our minds construct of memory
What figure stretched beside us, or what voice
Shouted to call us from our luxury—
And all the mornings leaning to our choice.

To put away - both child and murderer -
The toys we played with just a month ago,
That wisdom come, and make our moving sure,
Began our exile with our lust to grow.
(Remembering a train I tore apart,
Because it knew my heart.)
We move and move, but only love the lost,
Perversity our master to the bone;
We search our minds for childhood, and are tossed
By fevers to rebuild a child unknown.

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Not only from the intellectual child
Time has removed us, but unyieldingly
Cuts down the groves in which our Indians filed
And where the sleep of pines was mystery.
(I walked the streets of where I lived and grew,
And all the streets were new.)
The room of love is always rearranged;
Someone has torn the corner of a chair
So that the past we cultivate is changed,
Perfection mocked and answered by a tear.

Exiled by death from men that we have known,
We are betrayed again by years, and try
To call them back and clothe the barren bone,
Not to admit a man can ever die.
(A boy who talked and read and grew with me,
Fell from a maple tree.)
But we are still alone, who love the dead,
And always miss their action's character,
Trapped in our cells of living, visited
By no sweet ghosts, by no sad men that were.

In years, and in the numbering of space
Thousands of miles from what we grew to know,
We stray like paper blown from place to place,
Impelled by every element to go.
(I think of haying on an August day,
Forking the stacks of hay.)
We can remember trees and attitudes
That foreign landscapes do not imitate,
Which flower in the fertile interludes
Of memory beneath a stranger state.

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The favorite toy was banished, and our act
Was banishment of the self; then growing, we
Murdered the girls we loved, for our love lacked
Self-knowledge of our real perversity.
(I loved and then I put a sudden end,
Which age will never mend.)
It was mechanical, and in our age,
That cruelty should be our way of speech;
Our movement is a single pilgrimage,
Never returning; action does not teach.

In isolation from our present love
We spell her out in daily memory,
Thinking these images we practice move
On human avenues across a sea.
(All day I see her simple figure stand,
Out of the reach of hand.)
Each door and window is a spectral frame
In which her ghost is for the moment found;
Each scrap of paper has her magic name,
And when we sleep our magic has no bound.

Imagining, by exile kept from fact,
We build of distance mental rock and tree,
And make of memory creative act,
Persons and worlds no waking eye can see.
(From lacking her, I built her new again,
And loved the image then.)
The manufactured country is so green
The eyes of sleep are blinded by its shine;
We spend our lust in that imagined scene
But will not ever cross its borderline.

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No man can knock his human fist upon
The door built by his mind, or hear the voice
He meditated come again if gone:
We live outside the country of our choice.
Leaning toward harvest, fullness as our end,
Our habits will not mend.
Our humanness betrays us to the cage
Within whose limits each is free to walk,
But where no man can hear our prayers or rage,
And none of us can break the walls to talk.

Exiled by years, by death the present end,
By worlds that must remain unvisited,
And by the wounds that growing does not mend,
We are as solitary as the dead,
Wanting to king it in that perfect land
We make and understand.
And in this world whose pattern is unmade,
Cocoons of splintered light and shapeless sand,
We shatter through our motions and evade
Whatever hand might reach and touch our hand.

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PETER MATTHIESSEN

A REPLACEMENT

TOWARD the end of the war, a certain Headquarters retreated across the Rhine, leaving behind one officer and a garrison of local conscripts. The officer had asked to be left, yet could give no reason; it was said that he was ill, and there was no time to investigate the matter.

The officer sat alone in his office, as if he had fallen asleep while directing its evacuation; a desk and two chairs were left him, and a clean rectangle on the floor where the filing cabinet had been.

Before the desk stood a prisoner and a guard.

In the new quiet, it seemed to the officer that, one way or another, the war was over for him, he had nothing to do with it anymore. He was tired, and full of doubt about his health. He was not surprised, therefore, that this prisoner looked precisely like himself, although younger and more frightened than he could ever remember having been.

The night guard, who stood behind this boy as if he had captured him single-handed, reported that the prisoner had come in out of the cold of his own accord, that he spoke German, and that his arm was broken. Also, that he was an enemy pilot.

The officer struggled with these facts, but they did not interest him nearly so much as the prisoner's appearance. Long ago, he thought, I saw that face in the mirror, but I was much younger than he is, I was only beginning.

He remained silent, absorbed with this thought.

The guard coughed loudly, and said,

"Herr Oberleutnant..."

Which made him laugh, yet the sound of his own laughter snapped his full attention to the two men before him. He

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wondered at the same instant how long they had been there, and why he felt so desperately like laughing.

"You speak German, then," the officer said, controlling himself. He studied the boy from under the visor of his cap, which was balanced between the top of the chair and his forehead. The chair itself was shoved away from the desk, permitting him to stretch a rigid full length, with the soles of his boots against the desk legs.

"My people come from Germany."

"Interesting," the officer said, folding his hands across his stomach. He reclined in silence.

The guard took advantage of the pause by tiptoeing backward and seating himself stealthily on a second chair by the door.

"Your first time in Germany?" the officer said, and laughed, not at his remark but at the conversational manner in which he had made it and at its reflection of his inability to concentrate.

The boy did not answer. His lifeless face announced that only routine questions could loosen his tongue.

Over the desk, the lighting wavered, ebbing like a sick man's breath, then strengthened again to sour the room with yellow. It trembled with the quaking walls against the night wind outside, casting its feeble rays upon the silence.

The officer watched the prisoner's eyes. He doesn't recognize our likeness, he thought, but he doesn't know what he's waiting for, either. On the other hand, neither do I, and I don't understand, my own mind isn't doing my thinking for me at all, and yet I am too full of queer ideas to work at the interrogation.

PETER MATTHIESSEN'S *stories have been published in the* Atlantic Monthly, The Cornhill Magazine, *and the* Observer Prize Anthology. *Other stories will appear this spring in* New World Writing *and* Botteghe Oscure. *He is the winner of the Atlantic « First » Award for 1951, and is listed on the Roll of Honor,* Best American Short Stories of 1952.

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Although these thoughts were unnerving, they did not bother him as much as he knew they should, but only tired him further. His eyes were hidden from the prisoner by his visor, yet he could not close them. They had been open for more nights than he could remember, stretched and dry like bits of hide.

They will be open, he thought, whether I live or not, because if I die, no German will have time to close them for me.

"You're very young," he said, startled by his own morbidity, and when the boy only waited, he said,

"Why do they send you now, so young, I mean? I thought we alone were down to our old men and puberts."

"I don't know," the boy said. He was standing at uncertain attention, one arm stiff against his side. "I'm a replacement."

"Really? Whom are you replacing?" the officer asked, fingering through his shirt the crucifix suspended from his neck, and thinking, I wish he were replacing *me*.

"A dead man," the boy said, and stared at the officer.

How strange he should say that, the officer thought, whom can he mean?

"I'll have to question you," the officer sighed, "and send you away, but where's the sense in it, any more than letting you stand there?"

"I don't know," the boy muttered.

"You don't understand, you mean," the officer told him, and added, as if to the guard, "he doesn't understand."

"No, sir," the guard said, standing and sitting down again in confusion.

The officer looked from one to the other, twirling his cap on his finger.

"You've hurt your arm," he said to the prisoner.

"Yes."

"How?"

"When I hit the ground.

"This is part of your story?"

"Yes."

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"Start from the beginning, then." The officer sat up suddenly, pleased with such efficiency, and banged his chair upon the floor.

"My plane was hit on a bomber escort mission, and when I jumped, my chute ignited and burned out in mid-air. I fell through a tree-top and broke my arm on the ground."

The boy's voice was monotone, as if he did not expect his story to be believed; he winced at the roar of the guard.

The officer raised his eyebrows, and the guard stood up, abashed.

"That's your story?"

"Yes."

"Our German ground is very hard," the officer said. He placed his cap on the desk. "I can quite believe that you broke your arm."

The guard laughed loudly again, reseating himself with a philosophical shake of his head.

"Guard," the officer said.

The guard vaulted from the chair and hastened forward.

"Bring me the interrogation file, Guard."

"But the files are gone, Herr Oberleutnant!"

"True." The officer paused. "Bring that chair for the prisoner, then."

He noticed in the eyes of the prisoner that the order had been taken as a punishment for the guard's rudeness, rather than as a consideration of himself; he noticed this, but it did not interest him. "You can wait outside," he added.

The boy sat down on the edge of the chair.

"Listen..." the officer started.

"It was the only tree in the field," the boy said. His voice was still monotone, but his eyes were wide. "I can't believe it myself."

"Listen," the officer said. "You won't understand this, but my mind has been playing tricks on me all night. You can't imagine what such a tale does to me. And besides, it's very late at night, which is all right, it's my duty to ques-

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tion you. However, I'm overtired, I'd expected a replacement, and nobody came. Now start all over again."

"I've told you the truth," the boy said.

"You fell out of a plane and hurt your arm, is that it?" the officer snapped. When the boy only coughed miserably, clutching the arm, he added more gently,

"You're frightened. Perhaps you will be more frightened when I tell you that, with a story like that one, you will have to be shot as a spy."

"But I'm not a spy," the boy said, moaning a little.

"Why did you give yourself up?"

"What would *you* have done?"

"That's beside the point. What would you have done if you hadn't hurt yourself, falling out of your plane?"

"I don't know. Probably the same."

"You've made a mistake," the officer said, putting his cap on again. "You could have escaped. Or hidden. Your chances would have been excellent, speaking German as you do. If I'd been you, I wouldn't have thought twice about it. Why, in less than a week, you might have replaced *me* behind this same desk."

"I don't know *why* I came," the boy said. "I just came. I couldn't help myself."

"I can't understand such cowardice in you," the officer said, angry in spite of himself.

The prisoner said nothing.

"Did you expect me to believe such a tale?" the officer said. He tried to fire his questions briskly, to show that no nonsense would be tolerated, but he could not, he was too tired to frighten anybody. Anyway, the boy was clearly frightened already. And there was something alluring about his story, too, that detail about the only tree in the field, for instance. He sensed that if he were the other, he would never tell such a story unless he expected to be believed.

"Yes," the boy was saying, "I came because I expected to be believed."

So. And yet the story was impossible. The officer felt uneasy at not having dismissed it entirely.

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"No," he said at last, "You came here because you were frightened."

"Yes," the boy said. "I was frightened at having been allowed to live."

"Of course," the officer said, then added hastily, "I mean to say, there is nothing in international law that prevents the execution of a spy just because he is a coward."

"But I'm not a spy," the boy said.

"Nor a coward," the officer agreed, smiling.

"I don't know," the boy said. "I don't think so."

"Of course not," the officer said. He stretched back again in his chair and studied the ceiling. The empty office tired him, as if his responsibility had been removed with the filing cabinet, taking with it his brain and spine, all the components of himself which gave him the energy to live. The last of the energy was going to a boy as unreal as the likeness which he alone could see, as unreal as the war which, like a thinning mist, lost its stature as it overtook them.

"Tell me," he said, "What would you do, in my position?"

"I don't know," the boy said. He seemed absorbed by the pain in his arm.

"I only ask you because I think we are in many ways alike," the officer grumbled, and lapsed into silence.

"About me, you mean?" the boy said.

"About anything at all," the officer said, and after a moment, "But just now, about you."

"I don't know," the boy said.

"You'd do well to get an idea," said the officer angrily.

"Why not go and see for yourself," the prisoner complained, rocking back and forth over his arm. "There are bits of the parachute still in the tree."

"I thought it burned up in mid-air."

"It did. I wish you'd believe me."

"I *do* believe you," the officer told him, and they exchanged a look of surprise. "But who's going to believe *me?*"

"Come and see, then. Bring the guard."

"And besides," the officer said, "even if I do believe you, it's still impossible. How far is it?"

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"Maybe three kilometers."

"That's too far. My faith would never get me there."

"Can't we take an auto?" the prisoner said.

The officer waved an arm at the empty room.

"They took that, too. I can't be expected to walk."

"If you don't," the boy said, "I'll be shot as a spy."

"What in hell did you expect," the officer shouted, "sneaking in here like this!" He shifted violently in his chair, turning sideways to the prisoner. "That's true, though,' he conceded, and shifted back again.

"What were you bombing tonight, may I ask?"

"An artillery emplacement, at the far end of the valley."

"That was moved a week ago," the officer told him. "Your people have made a mistake."

"I don't know," the boy said. "I never got there."

"Take my word for it, then," the officer said, "I'm taking yours for much more."

"As a matter of fact," he added, drawing his chair to the desk, "you've got no business here at all. The whole night's a mistake from start to finish, you've been saved for nothing, because you ran here spouting German and saying you fell out of a plane that was bombing an artillery emplacement that wasn't even there. You'll be shot for your pains."

"You don't believe me, then?" the boy said. His face was surly with fear.

"Another man would shoot you for a spy," the officer said. He rose abruptly from the desk and stalked around it, circling several times between the prisoner and its front, then going around the prisoner to stare at him from behind.

"You won't change your story?" he suggested. "Say simply that you buried your parachute and fell into our hands by mistake?"

"All right, if that will help any," the boy said. "But it's not the truth."

"No," the officer said, "but it sounds like it, at least."

He strode up and down the barren room with his hands on his hips, studying the back of the other's head as he passed.

"You want to go to prison camp, then?"

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"I'd like to see a doctor," the boy muttered, turning his head around.

The officer stopped short.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mean to play with you. It's just that I'm tired, I feel like laughing hysterically, and I can't make up my mind to do anything about you, anymore than I can make up my mind to do anything about myself."

"Please," the boy said. "Come and see."

"All right," the officer said, and they exchanged another look of surprise. "It's a question of life and death, I suppose."

But the boy only waited, not understanding.

The officer laughed aloud at a deep impulse to cry, dragging on his greatcoat and shouting furiously for the guard.

Outside, the North wind clasped them in a grip of cold, howling and buffeting over the land, and the night clouds flew beneath the moon, which glazed the winter patches by the roadside and the trees wet black with March. The officer was excited by the night, and tried to sing out his exhilaration to the others—"Look at me!" he wanted to cry, "Can you see something happening?"—but it sounded somehow foolish to him, he did not understand it himself, and only said to the guard,

"I am sorry to make you walk so far, since it has nothing to do with you."

But the guard did not seem to hear him, and the boy repeated it for him in a voice exactly like his own, so much so that the guard answered the officer instead, as if the prisoner had not spoken.

"How alike our voices are!" cried the officer, but the words crumbled against the wind and passed unheard.

Doomsday night, he thought, and wondered why. Because nothing matters any more, it is the end of the world for me, he decided, alarmed because it didn't matter to him. Still, the thought was frightening; he squeezed the arm of the prisoner to be sure he had not vanished.

"We'll be able to see the remains of the parachute and everything?" he demanded, as if otherwise he would only be cheated at the last moment.

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"Yes," the boy said. His chattering teeth destroyed the word, but his nod reassured the officer, who marched him down the road more quickly than ever.

A little further, the officer shouted,

"I realize this is all impossible, you are tricking me in some way, yet you must not believe I am so simple as I may appear. It is simply that you have a nice face, you remind me of my boyhood, and I would be very sorry to have you shot without first ascertaining the facts of the matter!"

But the boy only mumbled inaudibly within his upturned collar.

They hurried faster, turning from the road and mounting the frozen valleyside to the highest field. Alone on the ridge, a great tree ruled the winter sky.

The guard was finished by the pace and sat down immediately, with scarcely the strength to peer upwards into the branches, but the officer walked forward slowly, his heart alive with the exertion.

"It's just as you say," he breathed. The wind had fallen, leaving his whisper to wander in the stillness.

He stooped to pick up the discarded harness belt but only held it in both hands, as gently as a holy relic, without looking at it. His eyes were fastened on the strips of blackened silk, which trailed from the branches above like devil's ornaments. The branches were twisted and broken, and a remnant of snow at the ancient roots was scarred with fallen twigs.

A miracle, he thought, I have seen a *miracle*, or I am going insane. He whirled and stared at the boy, who moved towards him with hesitation.

"I believed you. Forgive me for doubting myself."

The boy nodded, waiting, and the guard stood up, glancing from one to the other.

"You were saved," the officer said, "and then you were sent to me. Why?"

But the boy was staring at the tree, awed anew by the scene of his fall.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," the officer told him.

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"Tomorrow a train of exchange prisoners passes through for Switzerland. You will go with them."

They glanced at the guard who, following the words of the officer with his lips, still grunted in amazement.

"How can you do that?" the boy said.

"I can hardly send a man who has won a new life to prison camp," the officer said. He felt a little dizzy.

"But surely you'll get in trouble."

"With whom?" the officer whispered. "You don't understand, but *I* am beginning to..."

"No," he added, more loudly, "it is too late to get in trouble. Everything will be over soon, and it doesn't matter."

"Thank you," the boy said. He came forward and shook the officer's hand. "Thank you very much."

"You have a new life," the officer said, embracing him. "Make a good job of it."

The boy pulled away, embarrassed.

"Thank you," he repeated.

Their brief contact had filled the older man with peace; his eyes relaxed, then closed. He tried to open them but could not, yet it seemed to him he could distinguish the silhouette of the guard.

"Guard," he said, "you have witnessed everything?"

"Yes, Herr Oberleutnant," said the voice of the guard.

"It is a miracle, Guard."

"Yes, Herr Oberleutnant."

"Take this man to the doctor's house immediately. He will go on that train tomorrow," the officer said. He felt his way backward to the tree and sat down, resting his head against the trunk. So, he thought. It is over now.

"Yes, Herr Oberleutnant." The guard's voice came very faintly now because the wind was rising again. The boy called to him out of the shadows,

"You're not coming with us, then?"

"I don't believe so," the officer said, but the wind drove the voice from his mouth and sealed his lungs with cold.

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Yesterdays

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Youth

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Anecdote

Keogh 51

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Relationships

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Cockles and Mussels

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Entr'acte

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Theodora

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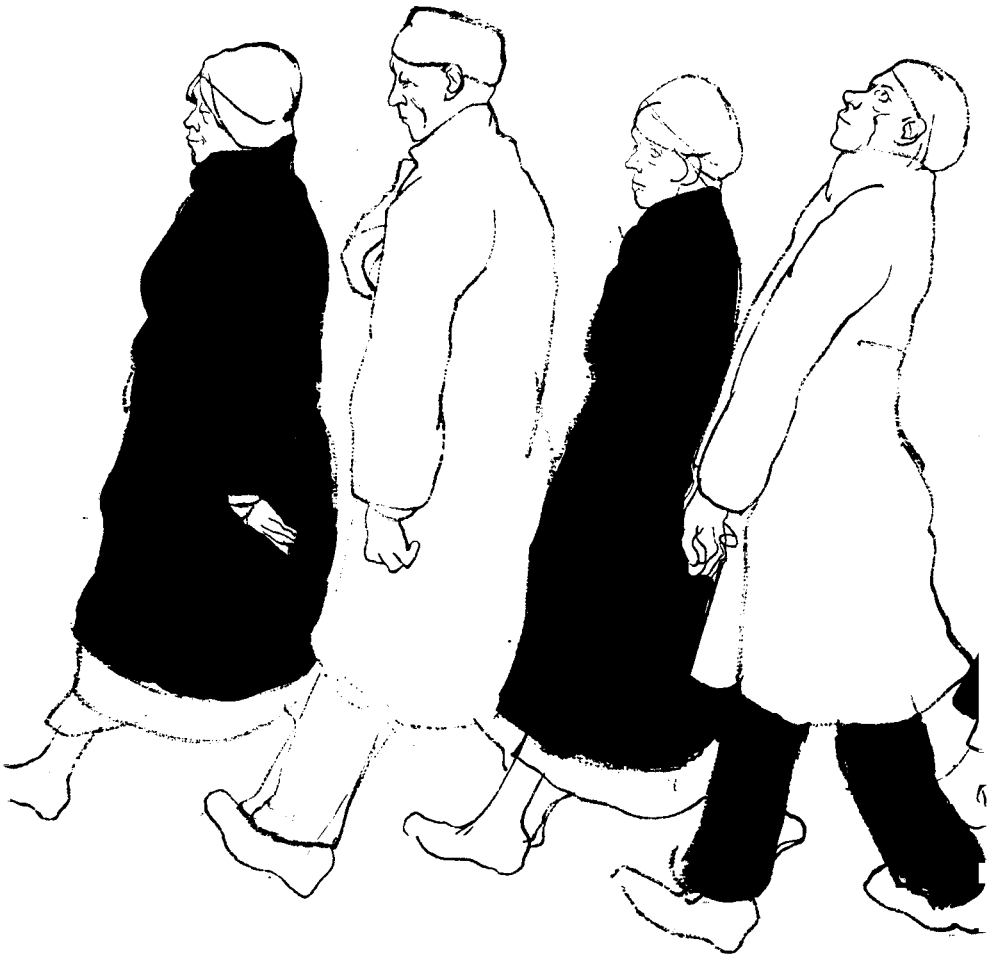

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Pantin Cortège

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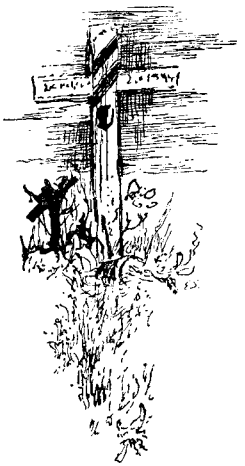

HENRY DE MONTHERLANT
Translated by PIERRE CONRAD

THE PANTIN CEMETERY

A Parisian looking for a common grave in which to be buried is restricted in his choice to somewhere in the suburbs, to one of the cemeteries reserved for Parisians out in Bagneux, Pantin, or Thiais. There is no common grave any more in Paris itself.

The cemetery at Pantin is next to the slaughterhouse of La Villette. Since it is flanked, besides, by the French-Mohammedan Hospital and the Prison of Drancy, one might well imagine it a sort of macerating vat, a charnel house ahere the poorest of the poor are piled in beneath the Arabs and the whole lot buried in turn by defunct cattle. This, of course, is the romantic notion I acquired before I went, with the aid of maps and my imagination, and doubtless the idea has its good side and its bad. The truth is something else again.

I am rather touched, however, when I reflect that the path which leads me here is the one the cattle take on the way to their final resting place. One thinks, besides, of the "singing aristocrats" in their carts en route to the guillotine, classifying the passing women into those who could be "made" and those who could not. I tried this myself from the taxi.

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When he dropped me off at La Porte de la Villette, my driver asked, "You going to the slaughterhouses?" I was delighted to find that I still had that look about me, for these are my colleagues, these bludgeon killers in their bloody aprons, with their glorious bacchanals, their crimsoned hands. I feel right at home. Long live butchery!—that's the way I look at it.

On the fringes of the cemetery things liven up a little. There's a place to urinate, a place to pay to sit down (the bistro), to sit without paying (the bench), and so forth. There is also a hotel and a perfume factory. And in the last flower shop on the Avenue de Flandre there is an extremely pretty girl—exceptional—eighteen years old.

Pantin-Parisien, established in 1886, is enormous, two hundred and fifty acres. It is just another cemetery, yet because of its vast area it strikes me as rather gay (except for one place which we'll come to in a moment). One is reminded here of the French gift for making tragedy a bourgeois thing. Here they howl with laughter, it seems, on sunny Sundays. Pantin is far more popular than other cemeteries. "Pantin's the last word," said the workman who showed me the common grave.

This grave is quite a simple arrangement. The pauper goes there but others are welcome, too. It often happens that the pals of the deceased get together right on the spot and raise the minimum price for a five-year lease, thus sparing him the common grave. Like the bone-pit, it is situated at the east end of the cemetery, and the trench system is practised. As a matter of fact, the expression "trench" is used as often as "common grave;" a cadaver is sent to "the trench." Now, as the bodies arrive, the trench is advanced. Regulation depth : five feet. Nine inches between coffins. Narrow coffins of white wood. Two children, provided they are under seven, may be buried head-to-foot in the same tomb.

These graves, side by side, are like all humble graves. No tombstones, obviously. Most have an inscription on a simple marker. Unidentified dead have a little branch stuck in the turf. A number have flowers.

The average body passes five years in the trench before being sent to the bone-pit. A few stay fifteen years. The

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proportion of bodies going to the common grave is a little more than six out of a hundred.

★

There used to be a bone-pit near the common grave. It's full now. Another has been dug at the opposite end of the cemetery, along the wall: the poor are always forced out to the edges.

I cross the cemetery, accompanied by a grave-digger. The alleys are named after trees, and go by sections. A section of Leclerc's army, of the F. F. I., of bombardment victims from La Chapelle and Noisy. Numerous Jewish sections, with headstones set up in the form of law tables. No Arabs: they go to the Mohammedan cemetery next door. Little piles of refuse are burning everywhere, and in this place, their insignificant smoking suggests the rites of some ancient religion. And dominating all this, what have we? The fort of Aubervilliers, so huge and sinister, seems practically invisible. What dominates everything is a sort of minaret colored like a birthday cake, on top of the building where the old *Illustration* used to be, with its monstrous great clock. *Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat.* A subtle touch, that clock.

The new bone-pit stretches out along the southeast side of the cemetery. Here too the trench system, but a trench sixteen feet deep and just as wide, where, theoretically after five years, the bones from the common grave are hurled pell-mell, as well as the bones from the leased graves not held for perpetuity. When full, it is covered over with earth, and another pit is dug.

Today the pit, just recently excavated, contains but a few scattered bones, as well as some paper bags containing others. When the grave-digger has lifted the skeleton from

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HENRY DE MONTHERLANT *ranks as one of the principal French writers of the half-century. Among his favorite themes are war, love, and the* corrida. *His most important books are* Les Olympiques, Les Jeunes Filles, *and* Le Maître de Santiago.

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its coffin he tosses the big pieces in as they are, but gathers the little bits into a bag before throwing them. The inner wall of the pit, running lengthwise, is a stack of piled-up skulls, tibias, and so on, green with moss, whereas those on the ground, more recently out in the air, are yellow. This inner wall which, I repeat, goes down sixteen feet, is impressive when seen head-on, whatever one's personal feelings in the matter. "I had you come here to see what becomes of everything here below." (1)

The pit is surrounded by a skinny wooden fence. Strollers have poked out the knotholes in order to peek, and sometimes they hike themselves up to look over the top. Sometimes, more simply still, they peer through the wide spaces between the slats. Since the pit is only a few yards from the edge of the cemetery, one can hear the peaceful tapping of hammers from neighbouring workyards.

What startles one immediately is that there is no relation between the treatment of the remains in the tombs nearby and the treatment of them here. There, such consideration, and here this sordid stacking. Yet these are the same *things*, and if they merit respect over there, why don't they merit it here?

It seems to me that one must adopt a certain view of a cadaver, and stick to it. Either it is something which, mistakenly or otherwise, should be treated with piety, in which case this stacking is odious and indecent, or the dead man is somewhere else, does no exist any more, and the body is nothing, in which case may they spare us the uncovered heads in front of the hearse, the silences, flowers, upkeep of the tombs, and the law against shorts in the cemeteries. But one cannot, without shocking absurdity, step from the second of these attitudes to the first, simply because so many years have elapsed : respect during five, or fifteen, or thirty years, according to contract and the price paid. I buy fifteen years of respect. Then the grave-digger's shovel casts me out like garbage, and leaves me to lie there, a naked skeleton, exposed to all eyes, mixed up in a horrible heap? No. We must make our choice.

(1) *Charles the Fifth, on his deathbed, to his son, the future Philip the Second.*

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★

In 1923, as I was keeping vigil over my dead grandmother, I felt tired and stretched out beside the body, where I lay for quite a while. And I have written, much more recently, perhaps three or four years ago : "I must admit that I love the premonitions of my agony and death." My imagination doesn't work to death's advantage.

But will I always be unafraid? It would be nice, but I dare not hope for it. Some twenty-five years ago in Madrid they told a story of a man unafraid of death ; as in my case, death did not excite his imagination. And not through provocation, nor even less out of sacrilege, but simply to prove his insensitivity to the macabre, he bet that he... here I must hold you in suspense, my memory betrays me. Let us say, anyway, that his act corresponded to passing a night in the Pantin pit, at the foot of the bone wall.

Our man sticks to his bet. In the morning, not a change in him, not even a suspicious gaiety. Just his natural, balanced manner to demonstrate how right he was ; he has nerves of steel, he didn't feel a thing. The next day, he was the same, and the whole business was forgotten. The third day he stares fixedly, in long periods of silence, and cannot keep his mind on what he is doing. The fourth day he goes mad.

★

But to get back to my account : my guide the grave-digger, whose observations are most rewarding, seems a bit ashamed at having shown me only the "accursed" area of his domain. He can't wait to lead me to the sections near the main gate, where the usual bourgeois sepulchres stand in overblown magnificence. He speaks of his work. "The drama here..." he remarks. And what is the drama? How could it be anything but death? "The drama here is the earth." By which he means the earth which is constantly moved about for one reason or another. I thought of Verdun. "Earth" was a word important to the infantry. Yet it gives one pause in a larger sense. Happy the man whose only drama is that of his own *métier*.

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Left alone, I strolled among the tombs. At Saint-Vincent Cemetery I had found but one with any sort of personality, the tomb of Steinlen. Life has its original people, however rare. Death wipes them out: there is conformity in the display of death, as if here more than anywhere to be in line were the thing. At Pantin, too, I came across only one unusual tomb. In Section 83, on a slab, there is this inscription:

HERE LIVES
MISTER SIMON BAUM
GENTLEMAN OF HEART AND SOUL
BORN THE 29th OF NOVEMBER 1873
DIED THE 16th OF OCTOBER 1942
IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Very strange, this old Jewish gentleman buried in a gentile section, who calls himself *Mister* on his tomb, who styles himself a *gentleman*, who makes the distinction, so subtle and so just, between heart and soul, who speaks of his solitude when so many tombstones would have one believe that their departed were surrounded by friends. But he is mistaken, he has at least one friend : myself.

Another tomb here touches me, that of a boy ten years old "dead by accident." It's not the tomb itself, nor even the photograph of the little boy on the tomb, but his laugh in the picture, his radiant, resplendent laugh, which is for me the sole poignant note in this vast funereal field. It is untrue that those who die young have the blessings of the gods. On the contrary, the saddest of deaths is that of the being who had most to look forward to, and knew it.

Seated on the bench, I scribbled the following notes.

Why don't two people who love each other ask to be buried together, not in the same tomb but in the same coffin? Then their bodies, decomposing, would penetrate one another and blend entirely, instead of the usual mingling of skin and sheet. That, it seems to me, would be love.

I can imagine the mother of the little boy, somehow reclaiming his skeleton—the concession is about to expire—and taking it on her knee, fondling it, stretching it out beside her. This, too, would be love.

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These two ideas do not strike me as morbid in the least. The main thing, of course, is to love. And I am astonished that nobody realizes this, after so many centuries of loving and dying.

Even at twenty, in *La Relève du Matin*, I spoke of that woman of ancient Rome who in order to be one forever with her beloved husband devoured his ashes. Let people laugh or shiver as they will, the principle of all such gestures is logical and normal and, to my way of thinking, not at all extravagant.

★

After a certain age, a day of great happiness (under the sign of love, that is) promises a sadder morrow than a day of gloom. On the gloomy day, one says to oneself, "How well Nature takes care of things! We have enough of something just when it is to end." But the day of happiness inspires a gasp of horror —"All this must come to an end!" At night, one sleeps off the happiness—like a too-heavy wine—and the following day is painful. Thus the reaction to the concept of death may vary from day to day.

This simple law, rather satisfactory after all—or it should be, if it is not—that the reverse of happiness is the fear of soon losing it, and that the reverse of sadness is the pleasure of seeing its end, in short, that happiness is poisoned and sadness consoling, this mysterious law of balance is verified in my own experience by my attitude when confronted with illness in 1930 and 1938. I felt, on the first occasion, the serenity of *Explicit Mysterium*, because the unhappy years of 1925-1928 were barely over. The second gave me several days of anguish, because all of the period 1930-1938 had been extremely happy for me. However, what I suggest could be mere hypothesis.

★

How can a man in his sixties justify making a move, making a telephone call, when he knows perfectly well what

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soon will become of it all? How does he justify anything which does not lead to immediate pleasure?

I see them, with death in three or four years written all over them, crabby, nasty, grubbing for a little extra despite their plenty, and out of their petty vanity, ridiculous yesterday, monstrous today, undertaking something which will end before it is half-started or holding back something else to be squandered by their stupid beneficiaries. Are they totally insensible? They have, I believe, flashes of awareness, and then they fall back on the telephone calls : without their momentum they would plunge to their doom as an airplane plummets when it loses its speed. Their moments of insight are called "moments of nervous depression."

As for myself, I am still unsure about the suitable ending for a life. To be an automaton which only works part time, or a spring broken by some insane idea of doing something or other? Or to be that wishful blind man who stumbles into the grave as he weaves an intrigue to make himself member of some administrative council?

All my life, more or less according to periods, I have acted—acts of pleasure excepted—encumbered by a soul which saw so clearly the vanity in these acts that it refuted them as fast as I performed them, and which sucked from them the greater part of their meaning. Pascal's two masters : the one who teaches you the sciences, and the one who teaches you to scorn them. What acted for me was a secondary self, a sort of shadow, which behaved like a sleepwalker. I was absent from my acts.

If this was the situation in my youth, how will it be in a few more years? What was to me a vision of life will be all the clearer as I myself decay. What difference will it make to me to know a little more or a little less, to understand a little more or a little less, to have a little more or a little less renown, if these things did not matter even when I had everything before me? At which point will it be too late, when it's already too late today? And without question I shall on the surface behave as the others do, but actually with what derision, what horror, with what denial of what I do ! Right up to the day when I wonder if I can lift my little finger ; paralysed by the insanity of making

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the slightest movement, dead before death ; a living nothing, I would say, if *nothing* could suffer. How can one pray for more time, except with a horrible laugh, when between the shoulder blades the worm begins to form which will devour the heart? Tomorrow even more than today one is struck by the motto which might stand for all of life : *Spring from nothing. Do nothing. Be nothing.*

An old man of strong religious belief need only await with patience the end of his interlude on earth, maintaining a strict adherence to the canons of his faith. What are fifty years of minor restraints in the face of eternity in paradise ! But rock-like faith is necessary : the slightest doubt and all is lost. It is then that we hear the Abbot Perreyve in agony —"I'm scared ! I'm scared !" For the old unbeliever, I'm inclined to think that there are no acts more justifiable than those of his immediate pleasure and those of his affection or charity. "I raise my little finger solely so that X... may be happy for a few years" (or a few moments).

★

The end of the day is at hand. A siren proclaims the closing of the factories. The changing flames of the burning rubbish piles are brighter in the twilight. Large birds, crows perhaps, reassured by the nearing solitude, appropriate the tombs : each one, I imagine, has its customary perch. At the Porte de la Villette, turning left, I took the Boulevard Sérurier, deserted at an hour when the rest of the city hums with life. To my right, the railroad, the frightful trains leaving, the marvelous trains arriving, the reddish squalor of the slaughterhouses dominated in the background by Montmartre's pearl-gray basilica. To my left, the wan façades of the last buildings of Pantin and Bobigny and the high smoke I remember from thirty years ago, when I used to play soccer in these suburbs. Everywhere, in the leprous green of the place, the stones propping up the corrugated roofs, tow-headed kids, tin cans, dog excrement. Below, the dreary network of canals and a pale child as still as they, fishing endlessly for the unknown in those soulless waters.

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F. GEORGE STEINER

FISH STORY

A poem must break to the surface
and nibble at light,
confounding refraction
and swallowing sense
at a sudden bite
with wide-mouth contraction.

A poem must be cunning
to avoid rhetoric flies,
anglers baiting with lies -
must dart for white water and running.

If caught on the hook of meaning,
a poem must whirl and fight,
tugging and constraining,
alert for oversight.

Loose from the critical reel
a poem plunges once more,
moves beneath manifest current
outward from net and from shore.

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A SAMURAI WHO TRIED TO KILL ALL THE ROOSTERS IN JAPAN

He : Deep in the cockerel's golden heart
I loosed my bolt.
The clarion-bird lies mute
under a fitful sky.

I shot the bell-ringer
with rusted Colt. Now you and I
forever lip to lip may lie
and time must part.

She : Clock's chariot is a juggernaut,
beneath its blade
both days and works are naught.
New cocks will sing
incessant dawn,
and changes ring
across cathedral lawn,

until both shaft and bullet strike
your marksmanship and my affright.

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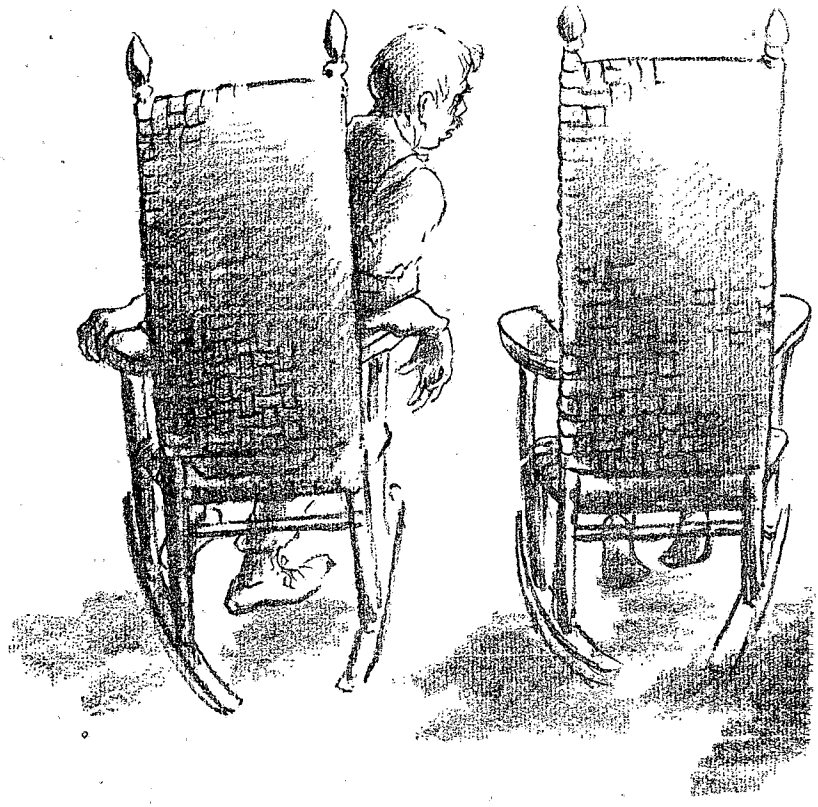

TROUBADOR

In the country along the Gulf Coast, in summer, the period of time between the setting of the sun and total black night is full of sweet mysteries, and has the effect of making the world with all its traffic stop dead still. Minute the sun slips out of sight, a hush grows, plants and trees visibly relax. This is the hour of perfumes and emanations : moonvines bloom, and pale ghosts grieve at the windows of vacant houses—invisible to some, and painfully visible to others. One smells strongly and suddenly the scent of green grass, of dust, the fecund richness of ditches and ponds; and after, all the white flowers that open at night. Under the oak trees the lightning bugs

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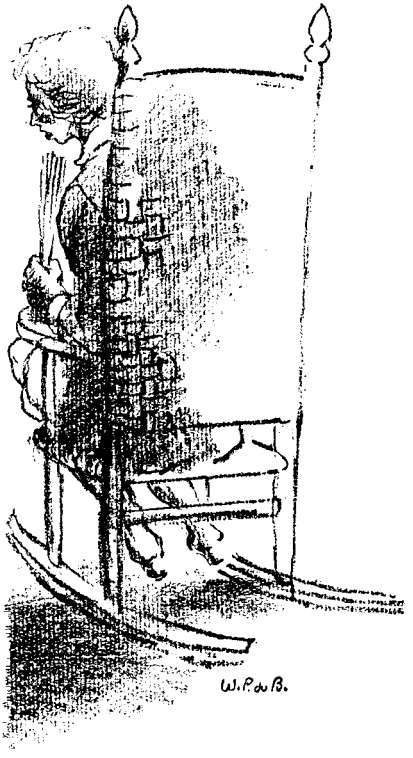

EUGENE WALTER

commence their play; dogs and even children are briefly awed. One feels that all the genii of the ancient world, who wait on the mind's back porch, could, easily, if they chose, break the screen door and run in barefoot, stealthy but gleeful.

On such a summer evening, after a furiously hot day, a lawyer named Tyler Scandrett sat on the front porch of a high old one-story house, shielded from the street by four camphor trees, and a hedge of abelia bushes. His sister, Miss Jeanie, who kept house for him, and who was given to extravagant dreams which she recorded in a gilt-locked diary, was stalking about the grounds with a hose, "cooling

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things off." Tyler, who had long since ceased to notice his sister—they'd lived amicably together for thirty-five years—was staring at the luminous apple-green sky, and enjoying a remote and pleasurable nostalgia.

Jeanie, never still, played at rainmaking in the yard, conjuring the heady smells of wet black earth. She gave a little cry, and he asked quickly "What's the matter?"

She mumbled something.

He made a little sound that could be yes, or no. When he made this sound (people who live long together can condense a hundred words into the *clack* of a cup set smartly in a saucer, or express paragraphs with a curl of the lips) she just said "Tsk!" with her tongue tipped against her teeth, and gave a jerk on the hose, which was how she boiled down: "Really, Ty, you act so superior, 'cause you went to law school in Philadelphia, and spent a year in Panama, but I, after all, am two years older than you and a woman."

Their exchange finished, he dreamed again, and she slank off under the mimosas. He was feeling, somewhere in his mind, that if he wanted he could dredge up from his memory some bitter and rather revolting memories to set his teeth on edge. For a moment he let flicker an image of his father's face when they had quarrelled on the day after the funeral, the father white with grief for his wife, suddenly livid at his son. Old quarrels, old moments of selfishness... Having distilled the drop of bitterness to make more sweet the perfumed twilight he gently put away the past and concentrated his eyes on the houses barely visible through the trees. Soon the streetlights would come on, one in a green veil of camphor leaves at the corner of the yard, another far down the street; then the interminable games of hide-and-seek would start. He sighed.

Sometimes the voices amongst the leaves saddened him; he'd sit quietly next to Jeanie (always busy with her own thoughts) listening with all his body to the rapidly chanted

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EUGENE WALTER'S *first novel* The Untidy Pilgrim *received the Lippincott Fiction Award for 1951, and will appear this spring. Mr. Walter, from Mobile, Alabama, is at present writing in Paris.* Troubador *is his first published short story.*

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"Fife-ten-fitteen-twenny-twennyfife-thutty," the muffled laughs, the cries of the hiders scattering through the trees, finally the exuberant "Coming-reddy-or-*not!*" followed by the silence of the search. How his body ached in that silence, for then he shared the tension of the concealed and the eagerness of the searcher; memories crowded in on him of Tommy Carly, Teensy McCorquodale, the Sanguanetti twins, his sister Jeanie with hair tossing. He asked himself how it was possible to have been so happy in those old days in the grove, and not to have known in the heart that one *was* happy, in a golden haze, in a forest of golden trees, in a lost time.

"Evenin'," said a small husky voice.

Tyler looked down through the bannisters, and there below the porch in the space consecrated to Grand Duke jessamines, was unexpectedly a little tow-headed boy. For one long instant Tyler felt the hairs ride on the back of his neck: this creature had surely sprung from the earth, or worse, from memory: Tyler could swear a Bible oath that the boy had not crossed the yard. But he was there.

"Good evenin'," said Tyler, hesitantly, waiting to see what would happen.

"My name is James Allison More, Number Four, it makes a rime," said the boy, not smiling.

Tyler strained his eyes to see him, could only make out faded shorts and shirt, thin arms, legs with knobbly knees and a big red mercurochrome splotch on one of them. A portrait of an anonymous child in a Southern summer, framed in a prospect of jessamines.

"Who do I have the pleasure to be speaking to?" the boy asked, with a solemn, courtly air.

"I'm Tyler Scandrett," was the gruff reply, then, "but your name will be Mud if my sister Miss Jeanie Elaine Scandrett spies you prancing in her jessamines."

"O, my!" said the dignified child, jumping away from the flowers. "And where might this lady be now?"

"Watering the entire state of Alabama. I think by now she's reached the Georgia line." Tyler, recovered from the initial surprise of the child's appearance, was determined to bring a smile to the face of this solemn creature. But the boy only looked across the yard, now deep in shadow, toward

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the sound of the hissing nozzle and the plat-plat-plat of the dripping leaves. He said nothing, and the silence waited. Then to Tyler's relief, at that moment the street lights turned on, flaring up yellow amongst the leaves made brilliantly green where the light fell. The porch was suddenly embroidered with rich traceries of leaf and bough; the light scooped all the bushes and garden-beds back into their rightful shapes, and banished wraiths. The hedge sparkled wetly.

Tyler stared at the child. Light didn't help much. Was he seven years old, or eleven: with his high forehead, delicate ears, and tow-blond hair strutting in every direction at once? Who could say? From where had he appeared?

"I wanted so much to speak to the lady of the house."

"That's my sister, but you can easily tell me your business."

The boy looked at Tyler, scrutinising his face.

"May I sit down, sir?" he asked.

"Well, for Christ's sake, boy, of course you can. Come on up on this porch and take a chair. What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"Oh, no, it's not that," replied the boy.

"Are you a Moore with two O's, or with one?" demanded Tyler.

"One O. M-O-R-E. James Allison More, Number Four."

"I know, I know," said Tyler, quite goodhumoredly now, "it makes a rime. Mine doesn't; you have the best of me there. But tell me, where are you from? You don't live here?"

"No, sir, I am from Contraband Bayou, Louisiana, but I have been living in Atlanta."

Tyler couldn't think of any further conversation, so sat quiet, still wondering at the dignity of the boy. He heard the busy hose suddenly silenced, and after heard the crickets and katydids.

"Here comes my sister. Exactly what did you want to see her about?"

The child said nothing. Jeanie appeared, pulling the hose back to its hiding-place under the Mexican Lilac. They watched her. When she approached the steps she stopped and cried out, at which the boy ran down and snatched up something from the brick paving. It was a toad.

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"Put him down! Put him down!" she cried, twisting her hands.

"Jeanie, you're a caution!" said Tyler, thinking how plain-out contrary she was. But Jeanie was always sharp to strangers, no matter their age.

"It's only a little toadfrog," said James.

"Put him down! Oh, I can't abide creepy-crawlies!"

"Yes'm," he said, and did so.

"Don't you know they'll make just perfectly gruesome warts on your fingers?"

"No'm, they don't *really* make warts." Tyler laughed at this.

"Who are you, little boy, coming down from this porch and catching my toadfrogs?" inquired Jeanie.

"Jeanie," put in Tyler, "you know you'd be happy to have that thing squashed dead."

"'Deed I would not. I'm used to him. I'd miss him sorely. And look at poor Lila Triplett: she doesn't have a single bird left in her woods 'cause she goes out every morning and claps her hands at the blue-jays. Minute we start squashing toadfrogs we can say bye-bye to Luna Moths and Monarchs, too. To say nothing of Cedar Wax-wings. I think they *tell* each other where they're not welcome."

"O, Jeanie!" intoned Tyler, impatiently, in his best court-house drawl, "they's a big difference 'tween bluejays and toadfrogs, 'case you don't know it."

"Oh, not so much!" said Jeanie airily. "Both toadfrogs and bluejays tend to mosquitoes: blue jays get 'em when they fly high, and toadfrogs get 'em when they fly low, and leave us thank the good Lord for that."

"Now you're using my arguments; I'd thank you to stick to the point. Besides, the reason Lila Triplett doesn't have any birds in her woods is 'cause to see Lila Triplett in the early morning light would scare anything away, bigger'n birds. You said yourself she looked like the ghost of a dust-mop, but I say plain Medusa."

"Who's your friend, Tyler?" Jeanie's voice had altered now, she regarded the boy fixedly with her sad eyes.

"This is Master James Allison More Number Four, from Louisiana." The child smiled tentatively.

"Four horizontally or four vertically?" she demanded.

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"Ma'am?" mumbled he, puzzled.

"Oh," interpreted Tyler, "she means are you named for your Papa and your Grandaddy and like that, or just is there four people in your family named the same?"

"My papa and his papa and *his* papa," explained James. "But they all dead."

"Your papa is dead?" He nodded.

"What about your mother?"

"She's dead, too."

"Where do you live?"

"I been in Atlanta but I'm going home to Contraband Bayou, Lou'siana."

"Oh," said Jeanie, eyeing the downcast eyes, and thin limbs, "You must be hungry!"

"Well...yes'm...but...you see, I'm hitchhiking to home... and I did think maybe you might be able to give me a little something to eat on the way..."

"Why, of course, of course we'll give you something to eat. We can't have hungry children starving to death under our very noses, can we, Ty?"

"No, can't have that," he answered.

"I had my supper," James went on, " 'cause a real nice man gave me a ride from Bay Minette, and gave me my supper."

"Well, in that case I'll fix you a nice lap-lunch to take with you," said Jeanie, patting her hair, and starting into the house.

"Have you come far today?" asked Tyler.

"From La Grange," answered James.

"Maybe James would like to wash up," suggested Jeanie, holding the knob of the screen door.

"No-thank-ya-ma'am." Then squeak-bang and she had disappeared in the dark hall.

A light breeze had sprung up, noticeable only as a kind of touch on the temples, and by the shifting shadows of the camphor trees. The voices of the children playing in the grove sounded and echoed from far away in the still evening. Sometime the sound of a door slamming or of an adult laugh carried from clear over at Bonville Acres, the night was so tranquil. A chorus of children were sing-songing :

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Draw a magic circle
And sign it with a dot!
This little finger did *it!*
This little finger did *it!*
This little finger did *it!*

Somewhere a lusty child's voice was crying out impatiently, "Hurry *up*, D. B. !" James sat quietly on the top step, watching the crazy shadows, somewhat chary of conversation with Tyler. They sat for a long time silent. Tyler, watching the boy, was thinking how terrible to be young and alone, yet how wonderful to be loose and wandering on the highroad, before the world's dimensions were reduced. James tickled his own dusty toes with a stem of grass, seeing how long he could stand it before having to scratch them.

"Is Atlanta a nice place?" asked Tyler.

"No, not 'specially."

"You have folks there?"

"My daddy was in the federal pen there, before he died."

This bit of news gave Tyler pause, narrowed his eyes. He studied James' tousley hair and big grey eyes. This casual infant, he decided, has known a life of misery and drama. The boy's shyness, which first annoyed Tyler, now gained his respect: this is tragedy's own manner, he told himself.

"Why did they send him there?"

But then Miss Jeanie was heard switching down the hall from the kitchen. Out she came, carrying a bulging paper bag, and a tray with a piece of cake and a glass of milk.

"Here," she said, "little boys always have room for an extra dessert, I reckon. And in this bag I've put plenty of good things for Mister James Allison More."

He took the cake and milk and went to work on them, smiling boldly now, and looking less like a pixie.

"It's real good," he mumbled through a mouthful.

"James says his papa died in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta," Tyler remarked conversationally to Jeanie. But she would never jump at a piece of news: she went on plumping up her cushion, then sat down in her rocker.

"What his papa do to deserve that?"

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"You ask him."

James looked down at his feet. "He shot mama." Jeanie and Tyler exchanged glances and raised their eyebrows.

"Maybe you'd like to tell us?" said Miss Jeanie.

"Papa was mad at the time," said James.

"A crime of passion," said Miss Jeanie, with real enthusiasm. "Oh, but please understand, I don't want you to tell us 'less you care to."

"Yes'm."

"Has it been a long time?"

"Yes'm, last summer. Well, like I said, my Papa was real mad at the time. I ran out to the woodshed when I saw him take up his rifle. I heard them yelling inside. Mama came out on the back porch and Papa after her, real mad, and he shot her, and she fell across the laundry basket. Then he went back in and shot Dokie."

"Dokie?" exclaimed Tyler and Miss Jeanie together.

"That was a friend of Mama's. A very nice man. He worked for the Lilybud Cup Company, that's those paper cups for drinking fountains; that's how Mama and him got introduced, 'cause in the beauty school Mama went to, in Lake Charles (she took the bus twice a week and on Saturday mornings) they had a big ole-timey water cooler, Mama used to put her Creme Soda in there to cool for lunch, anyway Dokie used to come once a week to take their orders for paper cups. His real name was Mr. Harry Jimson, but he had this way of saying 'Okey-dokey' that made all the ladies at the Belladair Beauty School laugh fit to pop, so they called him Dokie."

James swallowed the last bit of cake, and the last drop of milk. Miss Jeanie leaned forward and took the tray, deposited it on the fern-stand beside her chair.

"Sweet Land!" she exclaimed, "Why'd your papa kill Dokie?"

"Oh, Daddy didn't like Dokie being such a good friend of Mama's. Daddy is...was...a big quiet fella, he didn't talk much. Mama would sometimes say 'Clyde, if you don't say something I'll scream out loud,' and he wouldn't, he'd just eat his supper and look at her, then she'd scream out loud.

"Mama would say, 'All I want is to have a compliment

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now and again to make me feel like I'm alive and kicking. It's too much to expect to go to N'Orluns for the week-end sometime,' she'd say, 'but I do think I'd like to be told I look fairly pretty sometimes.'"

"You're telling the history of the world," said Tyler. "I know how it ends; but go on."

"Then Daddy would give her this look from under his eyelashes, kinda squinched up you know, and she'd say 'Clyde, if you make that face again I'll scream,' and he'd go on looking like that, then she'd scream, and then he'd hit her hard, and she'd run in the bedroom and slam the door."

"Noisy household," muttered Tyler.

"Uh...how did your Daddy ever...meet...Dokie?" asked Jeanie, forgetting to rock.

"Oh, Mama didn't want Daddy to ever meet Dokie, but I don't know, Daddy just found out about him. Dokie, you see, would drive Mama out from Lake Charles, and they'd stop at the Azalea Tavern for a few beers. Mama always said she was working hard at the Belladair Beauty School, 'cause she knew Daddy would raise the roof if he knew about Dokie. But Dokie was more fun than Daddy in a way, I mean he was always telling jokes, which Daddy never did, and playing tricks on people. Mama used to say, 'Dokie, you'll be the death of us all,' and he *was*, him and Mama at least.

"When Daddy went on night shift, Dokie would come to see Mama sometimes, and they'd sit on the front porch and talk and carry on till after I was in bed."

"Carry on?" asked Miss Jeanie.

"Well, can't you hear he's telling the story," snapped Tyler.

"He wanted her to go to N'Orluns with him, but she always said 'Gimme time, Dokie, we'll have to work this out.' Sometimes she had fights with Dokie, too. Not that Mama was mean, but she was real pretty, and she liked people to remember it. Mama laughed a lot when she was in a good humor, lotta times with Dokie. But once she and Dokie had a big fight, locked up together in the bed-room, and they tore the place up. I think they had some booze in there. Mama made me say it was me broke the mirror of

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her vanity table 'cause she had spanked me, but Daddy didn't believe her for one minute, and he was like an ole bloodhound when he was after the truth of something. Sniff, sniff. So after supper that night, he just marched me out back of the house, and looked me in the eye, nobody could fib to Daddy when he did that, and he said, 'Did you break up housekeeping today, or did we maybe have us another visitor, that wasn't calling on me?' I just whispered 'Another visitor' and he said 'That's all I wanted to know' and he went in and spanked Mama with a board.

"After that, Mama stayed in bed for several days, without any make-up on or anything, Penny had to take all her meals right to the bed. Dokie didn't come around for a week. Then one day Mama sat up in bed and said 'Suffering Cow, but I hope I'll never see another stick of Golden Oak again as long as I live;' and she moved all the furniture out in the back yard and painted it different colors. Daddy made her give up going to the Belladair 'cause he told her 'Ione, you know everything you could ever learn in Lake Charles and more, you better stay home and keep house.'

"So she did, then one day I was walking along the highway coming home from school, and here was Dokie waiting to pick me up, to ask about Mama, and to give me a present, all wrapped in fancy paper, from Adler's in N'Orluns, to take to her. And he gave me a fifty-cent piece for my trouble.

"Well Mama was pleased as punch, 'cause they was a pair of anklestrap sandals, color of lettuce, in that box. She strutted around that house all day, leaning close to the mirror, so she could see her feet in it. 'They're shurenuff chick' she'd say over and over, 'shurenuff chick,' then she'd trot around some more and say, 'I'd like to stroll into the lobby of the Roosevelt in these, and hear people say 'That is a girl with chick, furthermore in the latest style. No flies on her.' I tell you frankly, Mama put a lot of store in being well-got-up.

"Well that evening when Daddy was at work here comes Dokie in the front door to see Mama, and she kissed him smack on the mouth, and said 'Dokie, you have got real taste and that's something I like in people—real taste—yes, when they have real taste and know what is chick.' Then Dokie calmly

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shelled out a *dollar-bill* to me and says 'Skeezix, you go treat yourself to a good time, 'cause I have got to have me a long serious business talk with your Mother,' so I went to see Bette Davis at the Bijou over in Chester City, and afterwards had a chocolate malted at Chester Pharmacy and bought some comic books and caught the last bus home.

"Well, I could hear Mama raising the roof from a block away, with some mighty fancy whooping and hollering. I walked around the side of the house and looked in and here was Mama cavorting about the bedroom in her blue chinnel housecoat with her hair wilder than wild. And I was surprised to see Daddy standing there, I guess he'd come home from work unexpectedly. Then I saw Dokie sitting in Mama's little bood-war chair, with his hair rumpled and his shirt-tail out. He looked sick, all white.

"Mama was yelling 'Some girls in Contraband Bayou might be happy married to the original Frankenstein, but not me, I have spirit. I am an animated human being, moreover sensitive.' (Mama was originally from Bogalusa.) But Daddy din't say a word. Just looked. Finally he kinda mumbled 'Hmm' and turned out the door. Mama kept on tromping up and down, but her hands were shaking.

"I went around back to go in the kitchen door, and there was Daddy on the back porch loading his rifle. I didn't poke then, I ran out to the woodshed. Then I heard Mama yell 'Clyde, what the hell do you think you're doing with *that?*' Then she sort of giggled and ran out on the back porch and Daddy followed and shot her. Then he went back inside and shot ole Dokie right where he sat in there in that yeller chair. Dokie never said a word, just let himself be shot, can you imagine?"

"No!" cried Miss Jeanie in a loud voice, then collected herself and patted her hair. "Then what happened?" she inquired attentively.

"Well," continued James, his eyes shining, "I said to Daddy, 'You've sure done it' and he said 'I feel right relieved now that it's over,' and he said 'Go over to your Uncle Plug's and stay there,' so I did."

"Weren't you sorry? Didn't you cry?"

"Sure, like anything."

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Tyler cleared his throat and sat up straight. "Where was the trial?"

"In Baton Rouge. Then they took Daddy to Atlanta. But Daddy was the kind of person couldn't live behind the bars. Uncle Plug said 'Either Clyde or that clinky has to give, stands to reason.' I don't know what happened, but we had word Daddy was dead, so we went for the funeral."

"Did Plug go too?"

"Yes, but he had to go back right away."

"Why didn't he take you back to Louisiana?"

"O, I can't tell, I can't tell any more!" cried James, his voice breaking.

"Now, now, now," sympathised Miss Jeanie, stroking his hair, "Everything is going to be all right."

And it was, suddenly, all right, because he looked up and smiled a little at them, and said, "Everybody's been so good to me, so very good," and fondled the heavy parcel she had given him. They sat silent for an instant, a little embarrassed, while voices of children floated through the trees and the insistent "Commmmmmmme *on*, D. B.!" was repeated from afar, against the music of insects.

Miss Jeanie rocked sharply, her eyes intent on a spot in the middle of the air. Tyler studied his rusty hands, his mind busy with vivid tableaux of life in Contraband Bayou. This child, he said to himself, has seen more of life's sprawling energy already than Jeanie and I ever have in all our years. Why, he asked himself, did I not accept that offer to work for the criminal lawyer in Pittsburgh?

"Where will you be staying tonight?" he said before he realized he had said it. "We could put you up here."

"Of course we could," added Miss Jeanie. "You must be dead."

"Oh...well...you're very nice," replied James, "but I have a ride promised me if I'm down by the college gate at ten o'clock, they's a boy driving to Lou'siana. I better start over."

"Hold your horses!" cried Jeanie, and ran in the house.

"Well, son, I want to give you something might help out a little. Here." And Tyler pressed a folded bill into his hand.

"Oh, no sir, I couldn't, I really couldn't."

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"Nonsense, take it."

"How'll I ever make you and Miss Jeanie know how much it's meant to me to talk to you. It's terrible not to be able to tell people your troubles. I never tell people I hitch rides with; afraid it might scare them."

"There, there, we must all try to help one another in this world, musn't we?"

"Oh, yes sir. Yes sir, we must."

Then Miss Jeanie appeared with a jar of small pickles held behind her. "Here," she said to James,

Hold out your hands and close your eyes,
I'll give you something to make you wise.

When he did, she plopped the Mason jar in his cupped hands.

"Oh!"

"They're wonderful for travelling, especially when you get thirsty on the way."

"I wanta thank you," said the boy intensely, "from the bottom of my heart."

And he shook hands with Tyler, kissed Miss Jeanie, gave them both a long look, and turned and walked quickly off, glancing back only when outside the gate.

"I can never thank you enough. I won't forget this, you'll hear from me."

"Goodbye," they both cried, waving. Then he was gone.

They sat quietly a few minutes on the porch, then Miss Jeanie said "Oh...Oh.," and commenced to rock again, rapidly.

Tyler suddenly found the reason for movement, he had not written down the child's proper address. "Shoulda gotten his address!" he muttered, and streaked down the steps and across the yard. Had the child reached the corner? He tore through the privet that separated the front yard from the vegetable patch and careless of greenpepper bushes ran down a row to the corner of the property. He could see James standing with three other children under the street light outside the fence. Tyler slowed to a walk, panting as he passed amongst the musky tomatos, which hold the warmth of the sun overnight.

"I think D. B. robbed a restaurant," a sharp little-girl

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voice was saying. It was a rosy fat girl with straight black hair and a sassy expression. She was eating something from the lunch prepared by Miss Jeanie. For an instant Tyler thought that James had been set upon by wild brats, then he realized that James knew them very well. The other little girl could only be James's sister, by her hair and eyes. She was eating a biscuit which she offered to share with a tow-headed boy of four or five.

"Here, Billy," she said.

"No," said Billy, "full-up."

God help us, a whole little troupe of homeless wanderers, thought Tyler. James is sharing his food with his fellow unfortunates. Through Tyler's mind soared a splendid image of a kind of Children's Crusade, beggaring the road from Atlanta to Lake Charles. Outcasts, he thought, offspring of the country's most desperate criminals, wronged babes, left to travel as they may, like cockleburrs, affixing themselves to whatever kind heart brushes against them. He stood frozen in a kind of wondering silence.

"You were gone so long, D. B., we thought you were dead," said the fat girl.

"I heard you yelling."

"Well, I thought maybe we had to come get you."

The fat girl was eating a pickle, had gnawed it all away save the side she held it by.

"It's Betty Ann's turn now," said she. "You can take Billy to be your starving baby brother, if he'll keep his trap shut."

"I'm not hungry," said Billy, "I'm full-up."

"Well, honey, you could play-like you're starved, couldn't you?"

"No. I wanta play hide-an'-seek."

"He's rotten spoiled."

"Oh," said Betty Ann, "I want to go alone. I'm gonna try that big white house. I'm gonna say my mother is dying of some dread disease in Birmingham."

"Don't overdo it," advised the fat girl. "Whud you tell em, D.B., to get this spread?"

As the truth fell on Tyler with a mortal blow, he winced and cried out huskily: "What the hell's going on here?" and they all jumped. Billy began to bawl.

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"Oh-ho, an eavesdripper!" sassed the fat girl, with a delicious laugh. "Hit him on the head with a pickle!"

And she tossed the wreckage of the one she had been eating, which sailed past Tyler's ear and landed *plosh!* in the tomato patch. D.B. alias James gazed intently at Tyler's face with a long sorrowful spaniel gaze before he slowly and carefully stuck out his tongue. Then he joined the other children running giggling down the street. Tyler watched them disappear, then started back to the house.

Walking through the fresh-scented darkness, he decided not to tell Jeanie; he returned to find and bury the pickle. This will be my secret, he thought. Jeanie has her locked diary, I have lips that are sealed. Tonight will bear thinking about, he told himself. As he started again toward the house, a grin began to show itself on his face. It was hesitant in coming, but at last spread from ear to ear, till his face was almost luminous in the leafy night.

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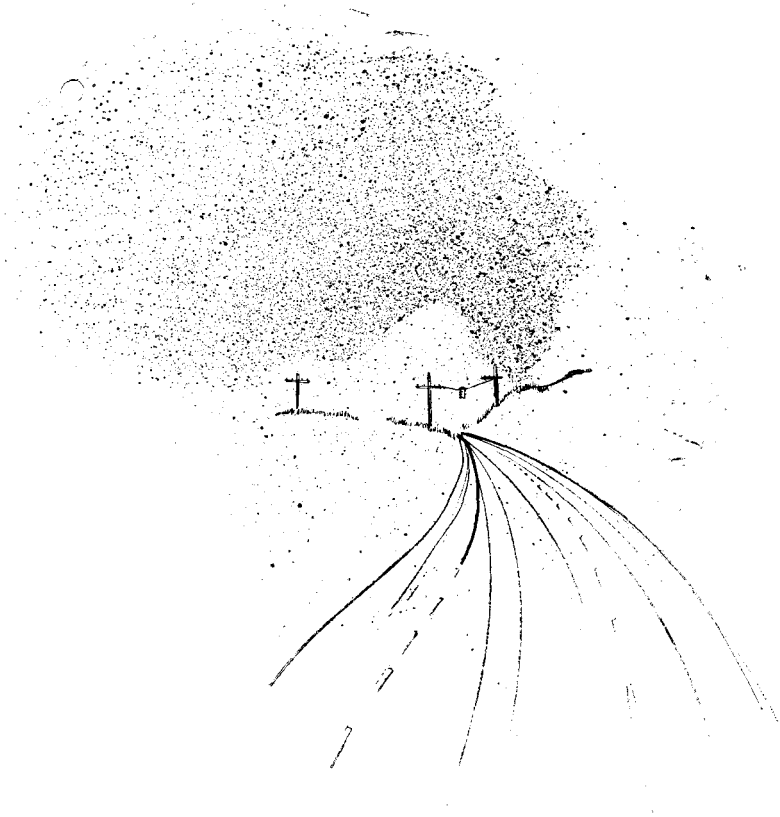

TERRY SOUTHERN

THE ACCIDENT

Dr. Eichner was a man of remarkable bearing, slightly above six feet, slender, with well set shoulders and a magnificently grey, patrician head. He stood on the clinic's shaded front veranda, waiting for his car to be sent around.

Looking over the sweep of lawn and the gravel drive, past the tight footwalks and overhanging trees, he could see beyond to Wilshire Boulevard where the stirring smoke and

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dust of property improvements wound up unending through the day.

At the corner of the building then, the car appeared, a white-frocked garage attendant at the wheel, slithering the heavy car on the rounded curve. The doctor raised his eyes like an alerted animal, the soft contusion of gravel under rubber wheels, he savored it, every sound and motion connected with an automobile, a low, heavy automobile.

Stopping directly in front of him, the attendant got out and held open the car door. Dr. Eichner studied his face keenly for an instant. He was evidently new at the garage.

"Good morning," said the doctor.

"Morning, Doc," the attendant said, "swell car you got there." It was a Delahaye, 235.

Dr. Eichner came down the steps slowly. "This is interesting," he said, "I've found most people don't care for foreign cars."

The attendant scratched his head confusedly. "Well, Doctor, I been a mechanic for twelve years. Before that I was a trucker. I ought to know a good motor and body when I see it." He gave the nearest front tire a proving kick with his toe.

"Yes, it's a fine car," said Dr. Eichner, getting in. The door shut with a quiet expensive click, and the attendant stepped back, as though now it was he who held a signal to send the car and driver shooting away.

"Well, so long, Doc," he said, saluting.

"Yes, so long," said Dr. Eichner, with a little smile for him.

Going down the drive, the Delahaye slid through the gravel like a speedboat over a slow swell. The doctor drove extremely fast.

At the bottom, where the drive poured into Wilshire Boulevard, the car slowed, perceptibly nosing down, and in a sudden squelch-sounding lurch, swerved up and out toward Santa Monica. As the car steadied and settled in the far lane, picking up speed the while, Dr. Eichner leaned forward and switched on the radio. It was the hourly news. He

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pushed the buttons, seven in all, then toyed with the dial-knob, allowing the indicator to rest on a serial-story program as, sounding the air horns, he took the wheel in both hands and pulled to the left, even into the oncoming speedlane, to pass a fast-moving convertible. Slowing at the intersection, the doctor turned left into Highlord's Canyon Drive. Ahead, the six-lane stretch dipped and fell in straight and desolate long graded runs as far as the eye could see. From his breast coat pocket the doctor drew out a thin silver cigarette case, steadily lowering the throttle while the countryside slid past like a speeded-up film, and the saccharine tedium of the announcer's voice was strangely muted under the climbing roar of the engine, *...just as we left him yesterday, still sulking down at the side of the black ships. Meanwhile, old Nestor...* Dr. Eichner twisted the dial-knob abruptly to a static blank, lit his cigarette and adjusted the rear-view mirror. There behind, a black sedan closed fast on the right.

These canyon roads towards noon are blazed with heat, and now the sun lay afire on the mountain land, striking every light surface with a wild refraction. Dr. Eichner turned down the green glass visor and floored the throttle, racing up a long slow rise in the highway road. The Delahaye touched the crest of the hill with a whirlwind drone and plunged into the descent as for an instant the black sedan was lost behind.

At the far bottom of the hill below was a crossroads with a traffic signal, and a quarter way on the descent, a white stone marker showing the distance from there to the intersection as one-eighth mile. It was Dr. Eichner's habit to time his descent on leaving the crest so as not to pass this stone marker until the warning amber had shown on the

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traffic light below; and then to race down the hill at full throttle and beat the red. The duration of the amber was five seconds, so that to clear the intersection ahead of the red light, he must do the eighth-mile in an average of ninety.

Now as the light was green he slowed the car leaving the crest approaching the stone marker, and the black sedan swung again into the rear-view mirror just clearing the rise behind, very fast. The front wheels of the Delahaye were squarely in line with the stone marker, the speedometer at sixty-five, when the amber went on the light below. Flat-mashing the peddle into the foam rubber mat, the doctor peered keenly ahead, where for the eighth-mile the road fell like an unwound ribbon only rising briefly again past the exact bisection of the crossroad, and the whole, in this perspective, resembled nothing so much as a giant flat cross of the Greek Orthodox Church. The intersection was deserted but for a truck that stood on the right waiting against the light.

In a high, singing speed, the Delahaye lay close to the earth, the tires sucked and clawed the concrete surface as the car dropped across the hill like a whining shell.

Behind the wheel, slumped British racing style, the doctor's eyes were just at the level of the top of the steering wheel when his wrists went suddenly stiff and he raised himself looking intently ahead as the large truck below appeared to have made an almost indistinctive motion forward. He sounded the horns in two long blasts and at the same moment glanced into the rear view mirror. The left half mirror showed the doctor's own brow go darkly knit while the other half held the black sedan, moving like a locomotive, apparently intending to pass on the right. In less than a second the two cars were plummeting abreast, and ahead the giant truck began to pull slowly out into the intersection. Dr. Eichner exchanged a quick, incredulous look with the two occupants of the other car, a man in front, one in back. The eyes of the opposite driver were fast on the right fender of the Delahaye as he seemed deliberately to edge the black sedan closer alongside with a lead of one or two feet. Dr. Eich-

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ner made an angry sweeping gesture with his hand and at the same time let up on the accelerator. And at that instant, the man in the back, his face pressed to the window, jerked his head toward the driver, his mouth working violently, inaudible behind the glass; and instead of passing, the black sedan maintained the lead, while now dead ahead of Dr. Eichner loomed the mammoth ten-wheel truck. Between the doctor's lips the cigarette butt went suddenly all sodden and leach; as he floored the accelerator, breaking the lead of the sedan, and twisted the wheel convulsively to the right, the Delahaye slammed twice into the black sedan with a savage ripping noise and the man in the rear was thrown back from the window towards the floor of the car. As he wrenched the wheel to the right again with all his strength, the two cars smashed together, the Delahaye held its swerve to the right, and before the doctor the windshield was a shattered haze of grey metal and high wheels where the amber light danced crazily above the scream of burning rubber and the sharp, double crack as the left fender of the doctor's car clipped in clearing the great truck just below the tail-gate. Now wide to his right, as Dr. Eichner fought the wheel, the black sedan careened out insanely, almost turning over in mid-air until it levelled straight for an instant at blinding speed on the shoulder of the road, and twenty yards past the amber light, with a wild exploding sound, ploughed squarely into a steel telegraph pole.

The doctor slowed the Delahaye as straight and cautiously as reining a mad horse, and he brought the car to a stop far down the road. But behind him, fused into the terrible pole, the pinioned twist of sedan belched one oily billow of smoke and burst into fire.

The truck still sat in the intersection, while out halfway between the truck and the wreck, face down in the middle of the highway, was the dark clothed body of a man. Beyond, the black burning wreck had torn half its own length up the pole, and the front wheels jutted starkly from either side the vertically split chassis: so thus the wreck itself was cast against the sun like a smoky crucifixion.

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Dr. Eichner tried to turn the car around but the wheel would go no more than half way. He began to back up toward the intersection. Behind him then the cab doors of the truck sprang open and a man and woman were down, running toward the body in the highway. They lifted him, as Dr. Eichner sounded his horn. "STOP!" he shouted. And while the two carried the loose figure toward the truck, the doctor tried to increase his speed in reverse but the wheels so rasped against the bent fenders that the car could not be steered. Stopping the car, he jumped out and began to run. Yet, even before he was abreast the burning wreck, a crackling inferno of upholstery and bakelite, impossible to approach, even then the truck beyond was pulling away.

The doctor stood at the pivotal point and looked up and down the glaring roads, glaring without the green glass visor, and desolate.

He reached into his pocket and drew out a small leather memo-book. Moistening the detached pencil, he noted:

Truck: 10 wheel, grey, van type with high short cab. No rear license or markings otherwise.

He touched the pencil to his nose, staring in the direction of the departed truck, then he added:

G. M.? Mack?

and continuing:

Man: stocky build; florid; sandy hair. Brown leather jacket over dark, heavy (possibly corduroy) trousers. Woman: medium dark, straight short hair... nondescript dress.

Dr. Eichner looked at his wrist watch, and at the top of the page he wrote:

Drexal and Lord's Canyon Drive. 11:20-11:25. 11:20-11:25.

Then he turned, quickly putting away his book, toward the sedan, that blazing wreck, fiery-moated now where for several feet on either side the earth itself leapt alight with gas and oil. There was a certain defiance in the way this car burned, and a threat. It was an amalgam of separate

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parts, no longer distinct, impaled, a fusion. An inviolate pyre.

The sides of the highway were shouldered with fine, loose gravel, and from a distance behind, Dr. Eichner scooped handfuls at the flames. After a moment of this, he took off his coat and stepped down the rocky culvert aside the road and up again, over a barbed wire fence, into the adjacent field. Here, under his knees he spread the coat, forcing it flat against all stick shoots of weed and nettle, kneeling, as with his hands he began to dig into the dry clay ground, piling what he could on to the coat.

In this attitude, the doctor started up at the sound of a plane passing far overhead. And caught like this, having only begun to dig, his head cocked to the breaking sound, the high distant shrill of an approaching police car; and without standing, as if at last really caught between the siren and the plane, the doctor knelt, and kneeling, cocked his head from side to side to determine the direction of the sound, the siren.

Then it appeared, the dark patrol car, frozen for an instant at the far top of the hill where last the truck was seen, and it dropped toward the doctor, the siren suddenly a wailing shriek. Dr. Eichner picked up the coat, waved it, running toward the fence and the wreck, as the patrol car hit the intersection in a screaming twowheel turn and plunged sideways to a sliding stop a few yards behind the burning sedan. Before the dust had cleared, one of the men was out of the car plying the spray of a hand-extinguisher over the wreck. As he stooped through the fence, Dr. Eichner shouted to make himself heard above the unchecked siren.

"Did you pass a grey truck?" he cried.

He bounded down the culvert, clutching the coat close, his head straight, as his eyes cast about at the rocky footing. He reached the car while the other patrolman was still behind the wheel.

"Does this car have a two-way radio?" The doctor had to shout, leaning his head in at the patrolman, against the wild agony of the dying siren.

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"Call the station," he said, "have them intercept a *large grey van*, going east on Drexal." He nodded as to give it emphasis, and then with a heavy breath, stepped back and loosened his collar, drew out a great white handkerchief and mopped his face and neck.

The patrolman opened the door of the car and slowly got out, all the while eyeing the burning wreck, where the other officer raced to and fro, pumping the extinguisher viciously. The fine spray of the hand-extinguisher hardly reached the front part of the upright sedan where the flames burned brightest on the blackened pole. Then he turned to the doctor.

"You see the accident, fellah?"

The doctor breathed with difficulty from his run back to the road and the shouting against the siren. But at the question he had to smile, rocked forward slightly, his hands clasped over the coat folded against him.

"Yes indeed," he said, "I might even say..."

"What's your name?" asked the other, already writing.

"Eichner," said the doctor shortly; "there was another vehicle involved in this, a truck. You may have passed it on Drexal, a large grey van." He intoned the last as a question while the patrolman waited, poised above the pad.

Then, "STOCK," they both looked up, surprised almost to anger, as the one with the extinguisher appeared beyond the hood, shouting, "STOCK! HEY, STOCK!" He was smudged and disheveled.

"Get Emergency," he said. He spoke with a slight lisp. "They've got to get a foam-pump out here. Did you see this thing?" He gestured impatiently toward the burning wreck. Patrolman Stockton and the doctor considered him mutely for the moment, as if the lisp must dry away from the words one by one and let them drop in the dust at his feet all raw and revealed.

"Okay," muttered Stockton, finally turning away, "okay, don't get hot." He got back into the front seat, lying half across it, to flip one or two switches and speak a hoarse whisper into a microphone attached to the far side of the dash.

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Dr. Eichner had his memo-book out, open to the page he had written on the accident, himself leaning through the open door.

"About the truck," he said softly, nudging Stockton's leg.

The message to the station was incredibly brief, composed of numbers, location, and time. He flipped the switch again, and sitting up, looked curiously at the doctor. Then he raised a forefinger near to his right eye and worked it as if calling a small child for a secret. Dr. Eichner leaned closer. The patrolman tapped his finger very lightly on the doctor's shirt front.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "you just let us take care of this in our own little way, okay, fellah?" And giving the doctor a wink that made him slowly draw away, he got back out of the car, took the report pad from where he had hooked it onto his belt, and began writing. "How about that name again?" he said.

"Eichner," said the doctor. From his wallet he drew out a card and handed it over, and for a long moment after, stared sullenly at his own dust-covered shoes, though gradually his drawn mouth, taking a twitch at the corners, became again something engaged, and his eyes sought Stockton's with light and perhaps a renewed allegiance.

"I *think* I begin to understand," he said, "you already *have* the truck. Of course. Who else could have reported the accident?" The doctor spoke the last word on the verge of delight. He pointed a finger at Patrolman Stockton, accusing without malice, but on the contrary, admiringly, as had the officer really been guilty of some laudable mischief.

Officer Stockton read aloud, "DOCTOR FREDRICK L. EICHNER," and copied it onto his pad.

The doctor had been holding his coat. Now he slipped it on and adjusted his tie. "I'm at the Hauptman Clinic," he said.

The other nodded, turning the card several times in his hand. Then, he looked up, and quite suddenly was staring past the doctor, down the highway where the Delahaye sat

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off the road. Though the two men were standing half-faced away from the damaged side of the car, it could be seen that the car's wheel alignment was out badly, the body leaning slightly to the left.

"That your car?" The patrolman squinted and stepped off at once in the direction of the Delahaye. Dr. Eichner immediately fell in closing step behind, but halfway to the Delahaye, Stockton began to trot, so that when the doctor reached the car, the patrolman had surveyed it once around and was now down, bent over low, looking at the underside. He rose dusting his hands and rested them against his hips. Facing the doctor before speaking, he jerked his head solemnly at the damaged side of the Delahaye.

"Your car?"

Dr. Eichner was slow to reply.

"Took quite a beating, didn't it?" he said finally, pretending to examine the damage anew.

The other eyed him shrewdly, then without moving his body, turned the head and called over his shoulder to the one at the wreck, he having exhausted the extinguisher simply standing aside now, watching it burn.

"EDDY! HEY, EDDY," called Stockton. Eddy came at a brisk gait, his head high in ready interest.

"Take a look at this," said Stockton jerking again toward the Delahaye.

Slowly walking the length of the car, Eddy gave a long low whistle, at the same time scratching his head.

"You involved in the accident, fellah?" He spoke to Eichner with almost no trace of his former lisp.

The doctor regarded him incredulously. "Certainly," he snapped, "just as I've been trying to tell this young man," looking at Stockton who was busy at the pad. "Now what I want to know," he went on to Eddy, "is who reported the accident? Do you have the truck or not?"

"*Yes* or *no* will do it, Jack," Stockton said in an offhand threat from the pad.

Dr. Eichner wheeled on him. "You listen to me, Officer," he pointed to the burning sedan, "one man is dead in that

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sedan, and another in the truck possibly dying, certainly in need of medical attention, the *truck* I say, which could have been intercepted on Drexal. And it seems to me that you two are forgetting just what the nature of your job is: to *service* and *facilitate* in these matters—not to impede—and certainly not to play the *grand seigneur* nor the dolt. You are public servants, maintained by the public and responsible to the public. And I advise you to keep this in mind." He ended with a sweep of a shaking finger to include them both, but only Eddy stood impressed, wide-eyed now, while Stockton went on writing and looking up and down the ripped half of the Delahaye.

"Take it easy, fellah," said Eddy in real concern, "take it easy," and standing close, he actually stroked the doctor's shoulder, "we're on the job, you don't have to worry about that, huh Stock, you tell him." He smiled a little embarrassedly at his colleague who, whether in feint or truth, was too occupied to take a part. On the pad Stockton's pencil made a flourish suggesting that a certain section or phase of the report was at that point definitely complete.

"All right, Doctor," he said to show his readiness, "you just tell us now in your own words how the accident happened."

While the two officers leaned against the side of the Delahaye, the one writing and examining the car continuously, the other following the narrative with open wonder, Dr. Eichner stood before them and told exactly what had happened, only omitting the fact of having raced against the red light.

At the end, the officer, Eddy, was agape, as though still waiting for the punch-line, and Dr. Eichner had to shrug to show it was all over so the other could give a long, low whistle and kick his foot in the gravel.

Stockton cleared his throat.

"Where do you work, Doctor?" he said evenly, "that is, just where is your practice at?"

"I'll be having a word with your superiors soon," Dr. Eichner was saying to Stockton and Eddy from the back seat of

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the patrol car en route to the station. "In light of that, perhaps you can realize it might be advantageous to you now to answer the question I put earlier: *who reported this accident?*"

The two sat base mute skulled before him, Stockton square-shouldered at the wheel, and Eddy by the window so straight and stiff-kneed he could have just been handed a crumpet in the Commissioner's living room.

The doctor went on, half-patiently, "Since you obviously failed to get the truck..."

"Why don't you tell the doctor who reported it," Stockton broke in to Eddy, who gradually moved himself to face Dr. Eichner.

"Ain't nobody reported it, Doc," he said, turning completely around. "We seen the smoke."

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C. CHESNAIE
Translated by S. HIGGINSON

THE YEAR IN FRENCH LITERATURE

In Saint-Germain-des-Prés, there is a lot of talk about publishers; in France as a whole, much less. In Saint-Germain people like to speculate about whether the winner of the Prix Goncourt will be published by Gallimard or Julliard; in France people look for and buy novels which they think they will enjoy. The war of the literary prizes is of interest primarily to publishers, and it would be a mistake to think that it influences opinion or affects the history and the future of the French novel. Here, at any rate, are some of the prize-winners :—

Dominique Rolin, whose first novel, *Les Marais*, was discovered by Jean Cocteau during the Occupation, won the Prix Femina on the thirteenth ballot with his *Le Souffle*. The Goncourt was awarded to Beatrix Beck for her *Léon Morin, prêtre*, her fourth novel, which appeared last spring. It went almost unnoticed by the general public, but from the first a number of judges, notably André Billy, made no secret of their admiration for the work. The Prix Renaudot was won by Jacques Perry with *L'Amour de rien*, his long, perhaps overlong study of young manhood.

But regardless of these results, we can be fairly certain that next spring when we come to add up all the books published this winter the most original, the most

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powerful and the most interesting will not have appeared in a list of prize-winners. The Prix Goncourt given last year to Julien Gracq involved a double accident : first concerning the tradition of the Goncourt prize itself, and then concerning the career of Julien Gracq—which no one could have been forseen and which the author of *Château d'Argol* did everything he could to prevent (1). It must not be forgotten that the prizes (and this is after all their justification) are aimed at encouraging and assisting writers who have not yet made their reputations. *Le Hussard sur le toit* by Jean Giono, one of the most beautiful and most original novels of the last few years, and *Galigaï*, one of the most unusual François Mauriac has written, were not eligible for any award at all. So—anyone who would be satisfied to judge the meandering course of the French novel by a list of prize winners would be risking a serious misunderstanding. You cannot put price tags on literary values.

I shall confine myself here to a few remarks having a certain bearing on the subject in hand. First I would like to say that the French novel is beginning to recover from the shocks and cross-currents of recent history. When the American armies liberated France, they opened the bookstores to an enormous production of novels which for the past five years have been served up to the public like so many Lucky Strikes. It was easy to see that the poor French writers were undernourished—they had eaten no meat and drunk no wine. Besides, certain influential professors of philosophy were maintaining that it was essential that first and foremost every novel plead a cause. We had just thrown off a totalitarian regime ; the time had come to insist that the novel must be enlisted under the colors of freedom. It was sworn never again to write novels like those of Giraudoux, or Cocteau, or Valéry, books written in a time when writers were not ashamed to be bourgeois.

For the time being the reign of the philosophy professors

(1) Gracq published a pamphlet denouncing the prize and then won it. —Trans. note.

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is over. A novel like *La Corrida* by Michel Déon shows that. It is a cheerful, cynical, graceful, sensitive book, written with elegance and ease—a typical French novel, although its setting is half in the United States, where the author has lived, and half in Spain. It is not a problem novel; the hero is neither soldier nor special pleader for any cause. But there is in it, I think, a way of looking at life, an attitude, that reveals much more about humanity than the heaviest philosophical thesis. This novel belongs to a little group that before the war included some excellent works by Giraudoux, Morand, Fraigneau, and Brasillach, and belies the fear that political chaos might prevent forever a return to any literature apparently so indifferent to its own disorder.

Another book in the same family is the new book by Antoine Blondin, *Les Enfants du bon Dieu*. Blondin's style is more polished than that of Déon and he has a talent for a sort of everyday-fantastic which places him as one of the best of the successors of Marcel Aymé (the author of *La Tête des autres*). *L'Europe buissonnière*, Blondin's first book, told of the Odyssey of a young Frenchman sent to Germany as a forced laborer. *Les Enfants du bon Dieu*, which could be called a sequel to *L'Europe buissonnière*, tells of the adventures, both conjugal and sentimental, of a young history professor. The subject is so simple that the details are particularly striking, ironic, and moving. Blondin presents an astonishing tenderness and sensitivity—really astonishing in this hard-hearted world—within the most restrained and classical form possible. Perhaps he will not receive any Prix this year, but anyone who would like to back a good horse in the long run would do well to remember his name. I must mention, without departing too far from the type of novel I have been discussing, *L'Homme du roi* by Félicien Marceau. This fairy tale takes place in the present but is laid in an imaginary country because it deals with political problems—a most dangerous subject. Pleasant to read, it shows the author to be an admirer of Stendhal.

Here is another group. First there is *L'Amour de rien* by Jacques Perry, the winner of the Prix Renaudot. It is easy

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to read, a novel with a story. He describes the mentality of contemporary youth, a rather dark picture. *La Plaie et le couteau* by Guy Le Clec'h offers a less powerful imagination but a more robust talent. I know nothing about the feelings of these two writers towards Albert Camus, nor about his feelings towards them; I mention Camus only because there is considerable resemblance. Then again there is Faulkner. One look at *Le Sang chaud* by Marcel Moussy (who has just made a visit to the United States) and at *Le Dimanche musulman* by Dabat will be enough to end any doubts about the care with which these authors have read and reread *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*. It goes without saying that they know that their own books, promising and successful as they are, are not equal to the books from which they have derived their style. At any rate, here is another demonstration of the lasting and fruitful influence of American literature.

I cannot say anything about *Le Dos au mur* by Gilbert Sigaux because it is still at the press, except that the author already has a practiced technique and is now one of our most moving novelists. If you prefer the humorous (which, like full print skirts, is in fashion this year), you should read *Au Bon Beurre* by Jean Dutourd. For psychological novels (not done much these recent years but enjoying a return to favor), you should read *Les Amants du Theil* by Paul Bodin, or *La Farandole* by André Brincourt.

Although we are ostensibly devoting our whole attention to the discovery of new work, we must not neglect the latest Giono—*Le Moulin de Pologne*—or the latest Peyrefitte, another section of *La Mort d'une mère*.

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GIACOMO ANTONINI
Translated by J.P.C. TRAIN

A REVIEW OF ITALIAN WRITING

SINCE the end of the war, Italian literature has been arousing marked interest in almost all the countries of Europe, and particularly France and England. A great many people, however, seem to imagine that the termination of hostilities and the overthrow of the Fascists started a new era in Italian prose and poetry. Not at all : although even in Italy people expected a radical change just after the liberation, nothing came of it. But in fact a literary revolution to correspond to the political was not particularly called for, since for the most part writers had been staying clear of the political scene, both in their lives and in their work.

After 1945, novelists, essayists and critics alike had a chance to write without having to worry about the censorship, but since only a negligible few had taken sides in political questions, they did not in general have to change their views. That is why we still see about the same names in print as before, and why there was no post-war break with earlier writing. The Italian writers today best known abroad—Moravia, Alvaro, Piovene, Soldati, Brancati, Pavese, Vittorini, Buzzati and others—were known in their own country before the war as young writers of importance.

Because of this continuity certain basic characteristics of

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Italian literature continue to exist: one of them is that Italy is not a country where the novel holds the place it does in England, France, and, in the last century, Russia. Although there have been a few really great novels, like Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* at the beginning of the 19th century, and Verga's *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro Don Gesualdo* fifty years later, the short novel has always been preferred. Ever since Boccaccio, Saccetti and Bandello there has been a tradition of the short novel in Italy, but it would be hard to disclose a tradition of the novel. Although there are good contemporary Italian novels, they are very rare indeed; on the other hand, there are any number of excellent short novels and stories. In Italy just as in England—we think of Angus Wilson and William Sansom—a young author can make a distinguished name for himself without having published a single novel.

The majority of contemporary Italian prose writers is made up of men whose temperament is essentially lyric: essayists, tellers of tales and chroniclers, who even if they write novels do not produce genuine works of imagination, but rather transpose autobiographical fragments into the shape of the novel. This is true of Angioletti, Comisso, Monelli and Patti, four very different authors whose books have been much talked about.

G.B. Angioletti's *Il Giorno del Giudizio* and *Donata* have recently been republished, and along with his lyrical autobiography *La Memoria* are the most representative of his polished and allusive style. *Donata* is almost a prose poem, and the picture of life that appears in *La Memoria* and *Il Giorno del Giudizio* is a poet's vision. Angioletti's point of view has had considerable influence on today's young Italian writers.

Giovanni Comisso is a tumultuous writer of variable quality, whose novella *Al Vento dell'Adriatico* and *Storia di un Patrimonio* show an extraordinary feeling for the Italian countryside. Each chapter is almost an Impressionist canvas. In his autobiographical *Le Mie Stagioni*, Comisso appears as a simple, direct man who seeks to quench his desires

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without troubling himself too much about the morality of the case. The book opens in November, 1918, when after four years in the trenches he sees opening before him for the first time the free and joyful life he had dreamed of during years of warfare. He describes throwing himself upon all the pleasures within reach, beginning with the rear areas of the lines, going on to Rome, and ending in Fiume with d'Annunzio's capture of the city, a fantastic but colorful bit of Renaissance history displaced into the twentieth century.

A contrast both to Comisso and Angioletti is Paolo Monelli, one of the most brilliant Italian journalists. His *Roma 1943* is a noteworthy account of the events leading up to the overthrow of Fascism, written in a careful but pungent style. This book, as well as his *Morte del Diplomatico* and his descriptions of European and African travels, is based on his own experiences.

We find something reminiscent of Monelli in the writing of Ercole Patti, who came originally from Sicily and who writes both of its calm and patriarchal ways and of the noisy life of Rome. He gives a satiric picture of the capitol in his *Il Punto Debole* and *Quartieri Alti*. His lightness and *brio* lead us to overlook his lack of profundity.

We find more serious qualities, however, in Corrado Alvaro, one of the most important of contemporary writers. Many of his novels, such as *L'Uomo è forte* and *L'Eta Breve*, have been translated into French and English. His last work, *Quasi una Vita*, which won the famous Strega Prize, is somewhere between a private diary and an autobiography. Italian authors writing of themselves do not have the easy manner of the English; one looks in vain for an Italian Sitwell, or anything to compare with Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* or Harold Action's *Memoirs of an Aesthete*. Without having their value, Alvaro's book has its own interest as a day-by-day journal of everything that attracted his attention for twenty years (beginning with 1927), not only his experiences but what he read in the newspapers. Alvaro was a liberal opposed to Fascism, but his personal eminence

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gained him a close-up view of the turbulent period he describes.

Alberto Moravia is about as well regarded abroad as at home. Bompiani has just brought out, in a handsome volume entitled *I Racconti,* a collection of his long short stories, which, along with the famous *Gli Indifferenti* and *Agostino,* remain his best work to date. His last novels, particularly *Il Conformista,* have been disappointing in their lack of finesse and depth, and in their negligent style and development. Moravia appears to have a way of being led astray by subjects more ambitious than he can control. But in *I Racconti,* when he summons up the life and the characters of the Roman middle classes that he knows so well, he shows himself to be a master hand.

The situation of Ignazio Silone is quite different. While he has long had innumerable admirers abroad, in Italy itself he is not especially well known, and is only accepted with qualifications. The appearance of his latest novel, *Una Manciata di More* may reopen the debate that followed *Fontamara* and *Il Seme sotto la Neve.* The ideas represented by his central characters—Rocco the revolutionary and Don Nicola the priest—are admirable enough, but they give the characters themselves the air of having been preconceived. Except for the political element in all his novels, they remind us perhaps a little too much of the school of rural realism that was so popular in Italy around 1920. Foreign readers found an attractive quality of the picturesque, but Italian critics found a picture that did not always correspond to reality.

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J.P.C. TRAIN

PARIS COMMENTARY

The golden age of the expatriate literary life is already well past, there seems no getting around it, although like most golden ages it may never have existed and be simply a useful myth, a theme of conversation and art. Certainly the sympathetic enthusiasts of Mürger and du Maurier, and even of Imagism and Dada, seem as distant now as the shepherd-folk of the pastoral convention.

George Moore, for example. We hardly know what to make of him :

> A Japanese dressing-gown, the ideality of whose tissue delights me, some fresh honey and milk set by this couch hung with royal friezes, and having partaken of this odorous refreshment, I call to Jack, my great python crawling about after a two months' fast. I tie up a guinea-pig to the tabouret, pure Louis XV, the little beast struggles and squeaks, the snake, his black beadlike eyes are fixed, how superb are the oscillations... now he strikes ; and with what exquisite gourmandise he lubricates and swallows.
>
> Marshall is at the organ in the hall, he is playing a Gregorian chant, that beautiful hymn, the *Vexilla Regis* by Saint Fortunatus, the great poet of the middle ages. And, having turned over the leaves of *Les Fêtes Galantes*, I sit down to write.

"Marshall," it should be explained, being a human friend, not another python. The writings are just as pretty as one would expect, by the way. *Flowers of Midnight* is what they are called, and he tells us about them with no end of gusto (this is in *Confessions of a Young Man*). In one of the Flowers a "light o' love" crawls out into the desert to

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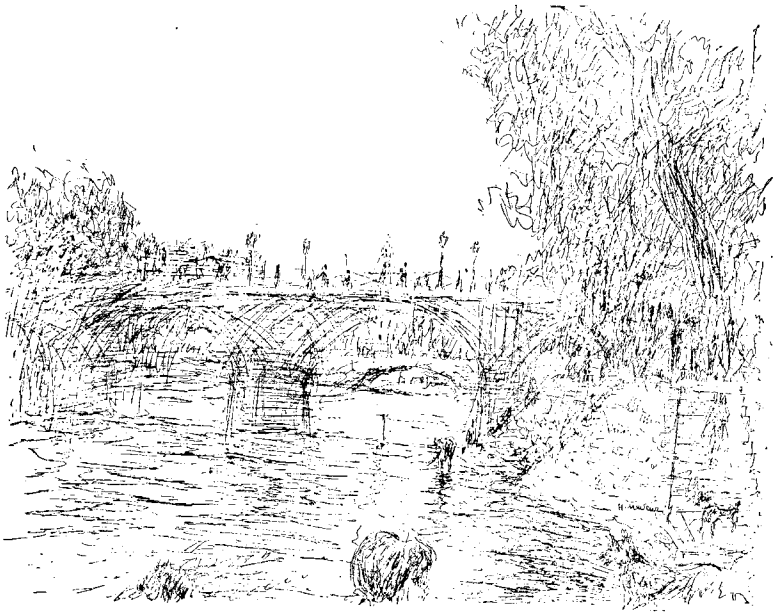

Le Pont des Arts *Hélène Neveur*

seduce a holy man. She succeeds, but as it happens he dies at the crucial moment, and by a miracle it is arranged that his arms lock about her body. The upshot is that she dies of starvation, a prisoner, while the corpse decays.

Charming! The author, in his zeal to see the last of the trans-Channel preoccupations with sin, progress and empire, has evidently thrown all the ballast out of the balloon. And indeed we feel that he has done worse than that. He seems to have neglected Montaigne's palmary observation that although people put powder on their faces it will not do to cover the heart with it also: "*C'est assez de s'enfariner le visage, sans s'enfariner la poictrine.*" Self-deception is likely to be fatal in an artist, and ordinarily a term in exile gives him the distance he needs to look back and correct his orientation; what happened to Moore, though, illustrates one of the dangers in life abroad: you may become so adapted to the new existence that you slip into it entirely, on a sort of superficial level, lose your natural stability and become

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a lop-sided exotic. The myth of Antaeus, who wrestled Hercules and renewed his strength whenever he touched the ground, is twice true for literature. First, of course, one must keep contact with earth, with flesh and blood, but also it is hard to survive for long uprooted and out of touch with one's own land, one's sources of life and true community.

The artistic justification of a writer's spending some time abroad far outweighs these risks and disadvantages, however. In the first place, he has an opportunity of a cultural cross-fertilization without which many artists never come to fruition. One can scarcely imagine what the writing of Rilke, Byron, Stendhal, or Joyce, for example, would have been without their long periods of exile ; none of Hemingway's novels has an American setting. And the process also benefits his native culture : Browning and the Italophiles of the last century greatly enriched and extended English literature.

Another advantage is the perspective given by distance. It is good to withdraw from time to time and look back with an impartial eye from quite a way off, and Paris is most convenient for the purpose. Furthermore, such an undertaking is reasonably well thought of here, while in the States it would be considered exceedingly odd. Again, unlike America, Paris still has such a thing as honorable poverty. With us a sage usually ends up in Hollywood or selling 5,000,000 copies or holding forth on a nationwide hookup, while here the idea of a philosopher stuffed with banknotes seems somewhat grotesque. I have heard the French complain that Sartre is too successful, and that the modesty of a life like Santayana's was more appropriate. In many such matters the French viewpoint is different from our own, and offers a valuable basis for reflection and comparison.

I do not mean to imply that the town is by any means the lotus-land for the foreigner that it may have been during the twenties and in the George Moore days. France has too many problems and Americans are too involved in them. Life is getting harder, the general tide of civilization seems

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for the moment to be setting, and the underlying mood is not optimistic. The suitable guide is less Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* than George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, a remarkable book, by the way. Orwell was educated as an English gentleman but eventually dropped to very nearly the most desperate condition possible for a healthy man in peace-time. He writes from an unusual viewpoint, one which indeed you perceive at the end of his simple narrative of experiences and observations to have in it something of the heroic.

They say that Bonnard hung the canvasses he was working on against an excessively bright, garish wallpaper. The colors he had to use to show up against such a background were so strong that a Bonnard in an exhibition tends to overpower the pictures around it, to make them look thin. Is it possible that in the same way the writers of today, pessimistic people like Orwell himself, are tempered and pretested in a way that writers who work in easier times are less likely to be? One likes to think so. Our period is certainly not favorable to art, but it is hard to see how Mann or Gide or the other authors we find deep and satisfying can ever seem thin or superficial, whatever other criticisms may be made of them.

Notable ages have usually been unstable ages, although there can be an instability that is inconsistent with civilization. Whether ours will be too unstable remains to be seen. In any event, a literature that like a ship is built in expectation of the worst is the one that can stand up in bad weather, and this pessimism, this sternness, is therefore to be expected in all our art.

And yet the mind goes one way and the heart another. In principle we accept it perfectly that the motto of the times is that everything is very serious indeed, but the misty sun shines all day long, the horses' hooves of riders in the Bois crash on swirls of fallen leaves, the brown beer in the cafés tastes better as the nights grow longer, and everything goes on cheerfully enough.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

TOM KEOGH, an American artist whose drawings are presented in this issue, designed the ballets *Don Quixote* and *Til Eulenspiegel* produced at the Théatre des Champs-Elysées, and the Hollywood productions *The Pirate* and *Kismet*. He is one of France's leading fashion artists. Now devoting himself to painting, he has exhibited with considerable success in Paris, London and New York.

P. N. FURBANK, a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, is the author of *Samuel Butler : 1835-1903* (Cambridge University Press, 1948).

F. J. H. HASKELL, Scholar of King's College, Cambridge, is now studying baroque art in Rome.

ROBERT BLY attended Harvard University, where he won the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize for poetry in 1950. He was an editor of the *Harvard Advocate*.

DONALD HALL'S *Exile* won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry at Oxford. His poetry has appeared in *The Hudson Review*, *World Review*, and *New Soundings*. At present at Oxford, he is editor of *New Poems*.

F. GEORGE STEINER was born in Paris in 1929. He has studied at the University of Chicago, Harvard, and on a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford. His poems have appeared in *Poetry* and in *Poetry from Oxford, 1951*. He is at present working on the editorial staff of the *Economist*.

C. CHESNAIE has published over a hundred critical essays in the course of his long life, but his principal occupation is the management of an agricultural property near Paris. His leisure is given over entirely to literature, and he is currently bringing to completion a trilogy of novels on the France of 1918 to 1930.

GIACOMO ANTONINI is one of the principal European critics, and is a regular contributor to *La Table Ronde*. He represents Bompiani, the Italian publishing house, in Paris, and is the French literary correspondent of a number of Italian newspapers.

Le Gérant et la Directrice : COLETTE DUHAMEL.

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